# CITY HILIGHTS

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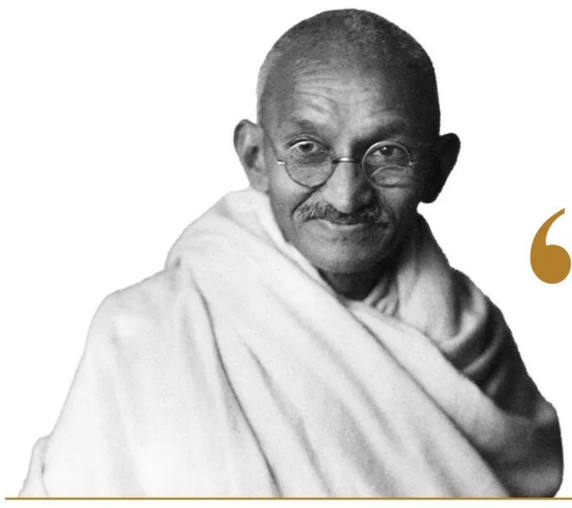
GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA

# Thousand Days

# From Hope to Happiness



"The future depends on what you do today."

Mahatma Gandhiji

Under the noble ideals of **'Antyodaya'** and **'Sarvodaya'** championed by **Mahatma Gandhiji**, the Government of Karnataka, led by Hon'ble Chief Minister **Shri Siddaramaiah** and Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister **Shri D K Shivakumar**, marks a significant milestone of 1,000 days in office.

## Key Milestones

**₹1.16+ Lakh Crore**
Allocated so far for the Five Guarantees

**2.11+ Lakh**
Families Provided with Title Deeds

**₹1.5 Lakh Crore**
Invested in Bengaluru's Infrastructure Development

**₹1.12+ Lakh Crore**
Reserved Annually for Public Welfare Schemes

**1.37+ Crore**
Families are Direct Beneficiaries of Government Schemes

## GUARANTEE SARKARA
REBUILDING A NEW KARNATAKA

## Development that Delivers.
## The Karnataka Model in Action.

Shakthi | Anna Bhagya | Gruha Jyothi | Gruha Lakshmi | Yuva Nidhi

CMofKarnataka https://dipr.karnataka.gov.in/

As is enshrined in our constitution, "to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture" is the fundamental duty of every citizen of the country.

karnataka information

QUICK READ

## KSRTC to offer free travel for PUC students during exams

**Bengaluru**
The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) will provide free bus travel for PUC students during exams from February 28 to March 17. Students can avail the facility by showing their hall tickets. The free travel will be valid on ordinary and express KSRTC services, allowing students to commute from their homes to examination centres. The initiative comes following a request from the Chairman of the Karnataka School Examination and Assessment Board (KSEAB) to ease student travel during the crucial exam period.

## Bengaluru techie killed in Canada: Remains to arrive Feb 16

**Bengaluru**
The mortal remains of Chandan Kumar, a 37-year-old IT professional from Thyamagondlu, Nelamangala, who was shot dead in Toronto on February 7, will arrive in Bengaluru on February 16. BJP MP K Sudhakar confirmed that Kumar's body will depart Toronto on February 14 and reach India via New Delhi at around 8:30 am. Sudhakar thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and officials from the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Embassy in Canada for facilitating the timely repatriation of Kumar's remains.

## UGCET application deadline extended to Feb 22, KEA announces

**Bengaluru**
Karnataka Examinations Authority (KEA) has extended the last date to apply for the Undergraduate Common Entrance Test (UGCET) to February 22. The extension comes after requests from students, moving the previous deadline of February 17. The last date for fee payment is now February 24. So far, 2.9 lakh candidates have registered using Aadhaar numbers, with 2.5 lakh completing fee payment. Document verification has been completed online for 1.8 lakh students, while 35,000 were verified at college level, KEA Administrative Officer Islauddeen Gadyal said.

# Smart travel, soon, Shakti card to enable women's travel on buses and Metro

**BENGALURU**

Women commuters in the city are set to get a major convenience boost with the introduction of a single smart mobility card that will work both on city buses and the Metro.

The state government is preparing to roll out Shakti Scheme ID smart cards, which will double up as travel credentials on BMTC buses and as National Common Mobility Cards (NCMC) for seamless access to Namma Metro. While the card will continue to guarantee free travel on BMTC buses under the Shakti Scheme, it will also function as a stored-value card for Metro rides, requiring users only to recharge the card to access train services.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy said the cards will be issued free of cost to eligible beneficiaries. Currently, over 75 lakh women across Karnataka use the free travel facility daily on more than 25,000 buses operated

by the four state-run transport corporations. In Bengaluru alone, around 22–24 lakh women rely on free bus travel every day.

The new card is expected to replace the current practice of showing Aadhaar cards to conductors, which has led to misuse through fake or out-of-state credentials. Integration with electronic ticketing machines will allow conductors to swipe the card to validate trips, ensuring accurate passenger data and preventing revenue leakages.

The state cabinet has cleared the project, and modalities for issuing the cards—both online and offline via citizen facilitation centres—will be worked out soon. Officials confirmed that the state database will be used to verify addresses and eligibility during issuance.

From June 11, 2023, to February 12, 2026, the four Road Transport Corporations—KSRTC, BMTC, NWKRTC, and KKRTC—issued over 668 crore tickets for women and spent Rs 17,313 crore providing free travel. The Shakti smart card is expected to streamline the process, improve data accuracy, and enhance convenience for women across Karnataka.

# Govt misused Rs 1,323.96 cr special grant from Centre, BY Vijayendra alleges

**BENGALURU**

BJP state president BY Vijayendra alleged that the Karnataka government has misused the Centre's special grant worth Rs 1,323.96 crore by diverting the funds to other projects and submitting fake utilization certificates.

Speaking at the state BJP office, Vijayendra released documents claiming the Centre provides special grants to all states in phases, with progress reports required on their usage. "Our state government has not given the special grant received from the Centre to the concerned departments. The funds have not reached the respective departments. Instead, the government has reportedly submitted fake utilization certificates to the Centre," he said.

Vijayendra termed the act a misuse of central funds and a

criminal offence, alleging the diversion of money from its intended purpose. He questioned the fate of Rs 5,000 crore under the Grihalakshmi scheme, asking if it was redirected without the Chief Minister's approval. "Where did the Rs 5,000 crore go, and to whom? Is there corruption? The Chief Minister has not given any answers yet," he added.

He further claimed that fake utilization certificates were issued by the Krishnabhagya Water Corporation and Visvesvaraya Water Corporation. The Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation, which received Rs 273 crore, reportedly submitted certificates worth Rs 132 crore at the Finance Department's request. Vijayendra demanded that the Chief Minister clarify whether these certificates were fabricated or submitted under duress.

**BJP state president BY Vijayendra has alleged that the state government has diverted the special grant from the Centre to other projects**

MLA Ashwathanarayana and MP Govind Karajol were present during the briefing. Vijayendra also criticized the Centre, alleging it was covering up failures and corruption. "This government has done a great injustice to all sections of people. The departments have not received the special central grants. Yet, they were forced to submit fake utilization certificates," he said.

The BJP leader warned that accountability must be ensured and urged immediate clarification on the misuse of funds, asserting that public trust and transparency were at stake.

## CCTV trail helps rescue kidnapped child, accused arrested

**BENGALURU**

Footage from two CCTV cameras—one near a temple and another by a bus stand—helped police crack a child kidnapping case in Sira, Tumakuru district. The accused, Shanta Mary (40) of Koramangala and her relative A Narasaiah (35) of Midigeshi, Madhugiri, were arrested after Narasaiah's confession led cops to Mary's house, where the child was rescued and handed to parents by the Child Welfare Committee.

The child went missing while watching Magodu festival celebrations with his grandfather, a bangle seller. Initial searches in the temple area were unsuccessful. With around five lakh people attending the festival, tracing mobile or eyewitness leads proved challenging.

CCTV footage eventually showed Narasaiah carrying the child, covered in a towel, with Mary walking alongside. Investigators identified the duo using mobile numbers and service provider photos. Narasaiah was traced to his residence and confessed, revealing Mary's desire for a male child and their plan to target a family from an economically weaker section, assuming the parents wouldn't complain.

Deputy Superintendent BK Shekhar and Additional Superintendent ML Purushottam led the special Sira police team that carried out the operation. Police said Mary's husband had distanced himself, leaving her alone with two daughters, and Narasaiah suggested the abduction during fairs. The child is safe, and the accused remain in custody as the investigation continues.

This case highlights the critical role of CCTV and digital forensics in resolving complex kidnappings amid large crowds, ensuring swift action and safe recovery of the victim.

## Bengaluru doctor battles legal hurdles to donate kidney to stranger

**BENGALURU**

In a rare act of altruism, Dr S Thankam, a fetal medicine specialist at Manipal Hospitals on Old Airport Road, finally fulfilled her decade-long dream of donating a kidney to an unrelated patient. First pledging post-mortem organ donation in 2014, she decided to become a living donor after learning about low conversion rates in deceased donations.

Her journey was fraught with challenges. Family reluctance, repeated rejections by the hospital-based authorisation committee, and legal barriers delayed the process. In 2023, she matched with a 24-year-old orphan on the cadaver waiting list, but permission was denied as the committee could not establish a relationship between donor and recipient.

In June 2025, Dr Thankam filed a case in court, and by December 2025, a high court judge directed the committee to allow the donation. The court instructed the committee to shortlist the top five recipients within five weeks. The first candidate was unfit, but a 56-year-old woman became eligible, and the transplant was approved on February 2. The surgery was successfully conducted on February 10.

"This is not just about donating a kidney, but also spreading awareness," Dr Thankam said. "We need to encourage young people to understand that donating a kidney to an unrelated person is completely safe. Non-related donations are common in other states, and Karnataka should follow suit."

Now 59, Dr Thankam's altruism extends beyond organ donation. She has served with Doctors Without Borders, completing missions in Yemen and Afghanistan, including a tour in March 2025. Her journey highlights the challenges of non-related organ donation in Karnataka while inspiring confidence in others to consider similar life-saving acts.

## Fake email tries to derail army fireman recruitment

**BENGALURU**

A fake email attempted to mislead candidates appearing for the army fireman recruitment at No. 515 Army Base Workshop in Ulsoor, falsely claiming that the exam scheduled from February 13 to 15 had been postponed. The message, sent from an address resembling the official recruitment ID, aimed to stop applicants from attending the selection process. Authorities promptly alerted candidates, clarifying that the exam would proceed as scheduled, and filed a complaint with the East Cybercrime Police. The official recruitment ID, 515abw2026rect1@gmail.com, had been used since January 12 to share admit cards and updates. A civil defence staff member flagged the issue after a candidate reported it. Police registered a case under the Information Technology Act, and investigations are underway to trace the sender and prevent further attempts to disrupt the recruitment drive.

# Nothing opens first-ever India flagship store in Bengaluru

**BENGALURU**

Consumer electronics company Nothing Inc. inaugurated its first India flagship store in Indiranagar, Bengaluru, on Saturday, February 14, 2026. The 5,032 sq. ft. store is the brand's first global outlet outside London, offering Nothing and CMF products, as well as official merchandise including apparel.

The Bengaluru store draws design inspiration from retro-futuristic 1970s assembly lines, using raw concrete, aluminium, steel, and glass. A dedicated experience zone allows visitors to interact with products, explore design philosophy, and make informed purchase decisions.

Carl Pei, co-founder of Nothing Inc., called the store "a major milestone," emphasizing that it was designed to foster community engagement rather than serve as a conventional retail outlet. Akis Evangelidis, co-founder and India President, highlighted the importance of hands-on experiences in India, describing the store as a platform for future product launches, collaborations, and immersive brand storytelling.

The company has already established India as a key market, with its R&D centre and global marketing operations based in Bengaluru. Nothing Inc. has invested over USD $200 million in India and pledged an additional USD $100 million alongside partner Optiemus to create 1,800 jobs over the next three years.

Since its first walk-in repair centre in Bengaluru in 2023, Nothing has expanded to Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Mumbai. The company recorded 577% year-on-year growth in 2024 and 156% in 2025 in India.

The new flagship store marks the brand's push to expand its retail footprint and strengthen market share ahead of the upcoming Phone(4a) series launch in India next month. It will operate daily from 11:00 AM to 9:00 PM at 660/1, 100 Feet Road, 1st Stage, Indiranagar.

## Siddaramaiah faces PIL over illegal mining leases, hearing set for April 17

**BENGALURU**

A High Court petition has been filed seeking directions to the Governor to allow prosecution of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah under the Control of Corruption Act for allegedly granting and renewing illegal mining leases. The petition also requests that the CBI investigate the matter. A division bench comprising Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice CM Poonacha has scheduled the next hearing for April 17.

The public interest litigation (PIL), filed by Bengaluru businessman MP Venugopal, was earlier dismissed due to the petitioner's counsel being repeatedly absent. Senior advocate K Shashikaran Shetty, representing Siddaramaiah, noted that the petitioners have sought adjournments multiple times, including during the latest hearing.

The PIL reportedly mirrors a prior private complaint filed by Ramamurthy Gowda, with the same allegations and parties, including Siddaramaiah, listed as respondents. The bench directed the petitioner's counsel to clarify details of the private complaint during the next hearing.

The petition alleges that mining licenses in Karnataka were issued in violation of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Control) Act and that certain leases were improperly renewed. It also calls for the Lokayukta to order an official investigation, with police involvement, and recommends cancellation of the licenses where violations occurred.

Additionally, the petitioners seek recovery of losses incurred by the state exchequer due to the alleged illegal grants. The court's forthcoming hearing on April 17 will examine these claims and determine the scope of investigation and possible legal action against the Chief Minister and other respondents.

The case has generated significant political attention, with opposition parties highlighting the allegations of corruption and misuse of state resources, while Siddaramaiah's office has maintained that all mining leases were issued in accordance with existing laws and procedures.

AYANAGAR POLL CHALLENGE

# *Soumya Reddy's Jayanagar poll challenge hearing from March 2*

**BENGALURU**

The Karnataka High Court has scheduled daily hearings from March 2 on the election petition filed by Congress's defeated candidate Soumya Reddy, seeking to invalidate BJP's CK Ramamurthy's victory in the 2023 Jayanagar assembly elections. The case will be disposed of within a month, the bench headed by Justice S Rachaiah said.

Reddy's petition challenges the results declared by the Election Commission and seeks a recount of 827 postal votes, claiming irregularities in the validation of ballots. During the hearing, Ramamurthy's counsel requested additional time to submit draft issues for the court's consideration, prompting objections from Reddy's lawyer. The bench directed Ramamurthy to file the draft by February 18, stressing that the petition cannot remain pending further and citing the Supreme Court's directive to dispose of election disputes expeditiously.

Elections in Jayanagar were held on May 10, 2023, with counting on May 13. Of 827 postal votes, 198 were initially rejected, leaving 629 valid—164 for Reddy and 415 for Ramamurthy. After 16 rounds of counting, Reddy led by 294 votes. However, election observers recommended re-verification of rejected postal ballots, after which the BJP candidate was declared elected.

Soumya Reddy's petition contends that the BJP candidate's victory relied on invalid postal votes and requests the court to invalidate Ramamurthy's election. She argues that all 827 postal votes should be recounted to ensure a fair outcome.

The daily hearings, beginning March 2, are expected to examine the validity of postal votes, procedural lapses, and any irregularities in vote counting. The court's decision could set a precedent for handling contested postal votes in Karnataka's assembly elections.

With the case proceeding rapidly, both parties are preparing detailed submissions, and the final judgment is expected by the end of March.

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The Truth Speaks

SUNDAY • FEBRUARY 15, 2026 • VOL: 11 • ISSUE: 212 • PAGES 12 • ₹2.00

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# PM makes historic touchdown on first emergency landing highway

PM Narendra Modi inaugurates Northeast's first emergency landing highway in Assam

**GUWAHATI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday made a historic first landing on the Northeast's inaugural Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) in Moran, Assam, marking a milestone in defence and infrastructure development. The 4.2-km specially de-signed highway stretch allows Indian Air Force fighter jets and transport aircraft to operate during emergencies.

PM Modi arrived from Chabua airfield aboard a C-130J aircraft and was welcomed by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Governor Lakshman Pra-sad Acharya, and Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal. The Rs 100-crore facility strengthens defence, logistics, and disaster response while serving as an alterna-tive to Dibrugarh airport. It supports fighter aircraft up to 40 tonnes and transport planes up to 74 tonnes take-off weight.

The Prime Minister witnessed a 40-minute aerial display by the Indian Air Force, featuring Sukhoi Su-30MKI, Rafale jets, An-32 transport planes, and Advanced Light Helicopters conducting Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) exercises. Garud Commandos also showcased precision operations.

Following the event, PM Modi departed for Guwahati aboard the C-130J to launch development projects worth over Rs 5,500 crore and attend public rallies in poll-bound Assam.

- Length: 4.2 km, Cost: Rs 100 crore
- Fighter aircraft limit: 40 tonnes, Transport aircraft: 74 tonnes
- Dual-use: Civil & Military operations
- Features: Aerial display, HADR drills, Garud Commandos demonstration

# CM defends 1,000-day record, slams BJP as 'jealous'

**HAVERI**

Siddaramaiah on Saturday said his government had honoured its commitments as it completed 1,000 days in office, calling the milestone significant. He asserted that his administration had de-livered on its promises and would continue its welfare agenda focused on empowering marginal-ised sections, including Dalits, women, backward classes and farmers.

Marking 1,000 days of the Indian National Congress government in Karnataka, title deeds will be distributed to around one lakh families at a convention in Haveri.

Leader of the Opposition R. Ashoka termed the period "dark days" and questioned the achieve-ments being celebrated. Responding to criticism from the Bharatiya Janata Party, Siddaramaiah accused the previous government of failing to fulfil even 10 per cent of its 600 promises. He said his government had made 592 promises, fulfilled 240 so far, and would complete the rest.

**Responding to the BJP's criticism CM said, "It is their jealousy because they did nothing in the last four years. That is why they are criticising us"**

On internal party matters and leadership speculation following remarks by Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar after meeting senior leaders in Delhi, Siddaramaiah reiterated that he would abide by the Congress high command's directions.

Regarding the Bedti-Varada river linking project, he said the Detailed Project Report had been sent to the Centre and approval was awaited, accusing the Union government of inaction.

On the pending social and educational survey report, he said it was likely to be submitted by the end of this month or next month, after which the government would take an appropriate deci-sion.

## Shivakumar Announces Land and Water Guarantees

**HAVERI**

Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar announced that, in addition to the five pre-election guarantees, the Congress government is introducing a sixth — a Land Guarantee. Speaking at the "Janaseveya Saarthaka Savira Dina" event in Haveri, he said land records have been issued to 1,11,111 people through surveys and proper title distribution, securing property rights for future generations.

He added that farmers losing land for the Upper Krishna Project will receive ₹35–40 lakh in compensation. If the Union Government approves major irrigation projects — Upper Krishna, Mekedatu, Mahadayi, and Yettinahole — within three months, the state will introduce a seventh guarantee: a Water Guarantee. This aims to provide drinking water to every household, irrigation support, lake rejuvenation, and groundwater recharge, including water supply to Chikkaballapur and Kolar.

On the Cauvery balancing reservoir, he said the state secured a favorable Supreme Court verdict, and a DPR is being prepared. He noted pending Union Forest clearance for Mahadayi.

Shivakumar highlighted that ₹20,000 crore is spent annually on free electricity for farmers' pump sets. Confident about electoral prospects, he predicted 141 seats in the next Assembly polls, up from 136, now 139 after by-election wins.

Criticizing BJP and JD(S) leaders, including B. S. Yediyurappa and H. D. Kumaraswamy, he questioned their pro-people initiatives.

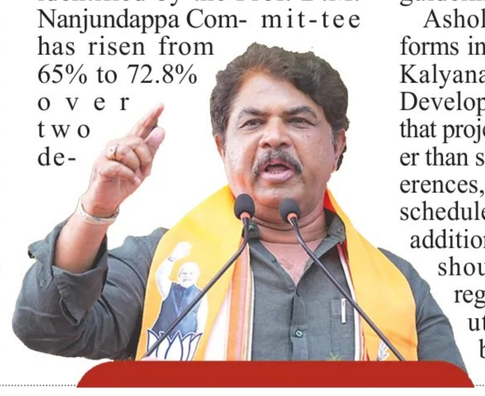
## BJP Seeks ₹15,000 Cr Budget to Tackle Regional Imbalance

**BENGALURU**

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, R. Ashoka, has urged Chief Minister Siddara-maiah to allocate at least Rs 15,000 crore in the upcoming Budget to implement the recommendations of the Prof. Govinda Rao Committee to address regional disparities. Ashoka blamed the Congress par-ty, which has governed Karnataka the longest and presented the highest number of Budgets, for the persistent imbalance.

He stressed that allocations to bodies like the Kalyana Karnataka Regional Development Board or other boards should not be counted toward funds for addressing disparity. A separate, exclusive allocation is needed to ensure accountability and prevent inflated claims.

Highlighting that the proportion of backward taluks identified by the Prof. D.M. Nanjundappa Com- mit-tee has risen from 65% to 72.8% over two de-cades, Ashoka urged the government to act decisively. He recommended establishing a 'Regional Disparity Redressal Monitoring Unit' to track allocation, utiliza-tion, and project progress, with strict timelines and penalties for guideline violations.

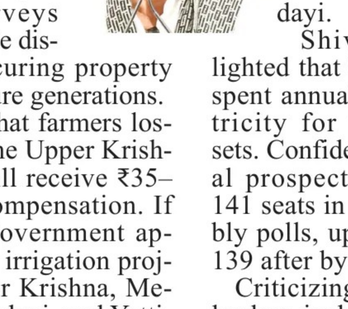


Ashoka also called for reforms in the functioning of the Kalyana Karnataka Regional Development Board, insisting that projects be need-based rather than shaped by political preferences, and imple-mented on schedule. He emphasized that additional Budget allocations should be made beyond regu-lar funds and distributed strictly based on backwardness.

## Rahul Gandhi's policy is to lie loudly, repeat it: Shah

**PUDUCHERRY**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of misleading farmers and fishermen with false claims regarding free trade agreements, including the Indo-US trade deal. Speaking at a large BJP rally, Shah said Gandhi "has started a new tradition of telling lies daily."



"Its Rahul Gandhi's policy to lie, lie loudly, repeat it. But people have identified your lie manufacturing factory," Shah asserted, urging the public to study the trade deal provisions carefully. He emphasised that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ensured "100 per cent protection" for Indian farmers and fishermen under current agreements.

Shah also criticised the previous UPA government, claiming that farmers' interests were "sold off" during the tenure of the late Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Highlighting BJP's governance record, he expressed confidence that the Modi-led NDA would return to power at the Centre in 2029.

**Goyal slams Rahul Gandhi as "immature," defends Modi govt**

In Mumbai, Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal called Congress leader Rahul Gandhi "immature" and said he lacks understanding of the economy. Addressing media, Goyal said Rahul is "thousand miles away from the truth" and claimed that "discredited leaders" like him may make allegations, but would not be able to stop Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies or initiatives. The remarks came in response to Rahul Gandhi's criticism of the India-US trade deal.

## '18 pc vs 0 pc tariff trap': Rahul slams Modi over India-US trade deal

**NEW DELHI**

Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "cheating" India's cotton farmers and textile exporters through the inter-im India-US trade agreement, warning of a "no-win" scenario for rural and industrial sectors.

Gandhi highlighted a tariff disparity in the pact, pointing out that Bangladeshi garments using American-grown cotton would enter the U.S. market duty-free, while Indian exports face an 18% tariff. He claimed this forces India to choose be-tween importing U.S. cotton—hurting domestic farmers—or remaining competi-tive in global markets.

"18 per cent tariff vs 0 per cent — this is a trap," Gandhi wrote on X. He warned that millions of families relying on labor-intensive sectors could face unemployment and economic crisis.

The Congress leader also alleged that Bangladesh may reduce Indian cotton im-ports in favor of U.S. supplies, deepening the disadvantage for Indian exporters. Gandhi called Modi "Narendra 'Surrender' Modi," arguing that the government failed to protect farmers and industry simultaneously.

## 'Centre approves Assam's first underwater road-cum-rail tunnel'

**GUWAHATI**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday called the Centre's ap-proval for the country's first twin-tube underwater road-cum-rail tunnel a "historic milestone." The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, cleared the project connecting Gohpur and Numaligarh at a total cost of Rs 18,662 crore.

The 33.7 km four-lane corridor will include a 15.79 km tunnel beneath the Brah-maputra River, reducing the distance between Numaligarh and Gohpur from 240 km to just 34 km, and cutting travel time by 95 per cent from six hours to 20 minutes. The project will also be Assam's fourth rail line across the Brahmaputra, easing passenger and freight movement while enhancing logistics efficiency.

"This tunnel will be a strategic lifeline for Assam and the entire Northeast, unlock-ing trade, tourism, and industrial growth," Sarma said, expressing gratitude to PM Modi and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari for supporting the initiative. The project, conceived in 2021, is expected to transform connectivity in the re-gion, significantly lowering transport costs.

**QUICK READ**

### Bengaluru set for bigger push in state budget

**BENGALURU**

Bengaluru is poised to receive a significant boost in the upcoming state budget, with allocations expected to cross Rs 12,000 crore for infrastructure and civic projects. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah faces pressure to address demands for better roads, footpaths, and waste management ahead of likely Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) polls this year. Deputy CM DK Shivakumar is also pushing for higher grants, including funding for projects like the tunnel road. Sources say ward-level allocations for 369 councillors will add further strain on the state government's budget planning.

### Metro Pillar Collapse in Mulund Kills 1, Injures 3

**MUMBAI**

One person was killed and three others injured when a portion of an under-construction metro line collapsed onto vehicles near Mulund Fire Station on Saturday afternoon. The slab fell onto a passing autorickshaw and car at 12:15 pm near pier 196 of the Line 4 project along LBS Road. The deceased was identified as Ramdhan Yadav, while the injured—Rajkumar Indrajeet Yadav, Mahendra Pratap Yadav, and Deepa Ruhiya—were taken to hospital; Rajkumar remains critical. Congress leader Varsha Gaikwad criticised authorities, calling for accountability and stricter safety measures at construction sites.

**PEOPLE FIRST POLICY**

## *'Interest of Bangladesh comes first': Tarique Rahman*

**DHAKA**

A day after the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) secured a sweeping mandate in the general elections, its chairperson and prime minister-in-waiting Tarique Rahman said his government would place Bangladesh's national interest above all else, including in its ties with India.

Addressing a press conference on Saturday, Rahman dedicated the victory to citizens who "aspired to and have sacrificed for democracy," and called for unity across political divides. "This victory belongs to Bangladesh, belongs to democra-cy," he said, adding that national unity would be key as the country navigates a challenging transition.

Responding to a question on relations with India, Rahman said, "The interest of Bangladesh and the interest of Bangladeshi people comes first. By protecting those interests, we will decide our foreign policy."

The BNP-led alliance won 212 seats in Thursday's polls, the first since the 2024 uprising that ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. An alliance led by Ja-maat-e-Islami finished second with 77 seats, while Hasina's Awami League was barred from contesting.

Rahman acknowledged the scale of the task ahead, citing a fragile economy and weakened institutions. "Our paths and opinions may differ, but in the interest of the country, we must remain united," he said.

The 60-year-old leader returned to Bangladesh only in December after 17 years in exile in Britain, marking a dramatic political comeback for a figure long absent from Dhaka's frontline politics.

## QUICK READ

### Mahashivarathri: Special pooja at historic Sri Avimukteshwara Temple

**Bengaluru**

Mahashivarathri will be celebrated with religious fervour at the historic Sri Avimukteshwara Temple in Hoskote town today. The temple authorities have arranged special abhishekam, elaborate flower decoration of the deity, and other traditional rituals as part of the celebrations. Prasadam will be distributed to devotees with the support and cooperation of donors. MLA Sharath Bachegowda, former MP B N Bache Gowda, and several prominent personalities are expected to participate in the festivities. Temple committee convener and Hoskote Planning Authority Chairman N Keshava Murthy has appealed to devotees to visit the temple and seek divine blessings on the auspicious occasion.

### Mahashivarathri celebrations at Sri Kashi Vishweswara Temple

**Bengaluru**

Special pooja will be held at Sri Kashi Vishweswara Temple in Hoskote today to mark Mahashivarathri. Rituals will begin at 6.30 am, followed by intermediary poojas at 4 pm, 10 pm, 1 am and 4 am. Prasad will be distributed from 10 am to 11 pm, according to a release issued by convener H R Uddi Vijayakumar. Cultural programmes including Bharatanatyam, bhajans and dance performances have been organised, sponsored by Chandrashekar, Managing Director of Shreyas Maternity Home, and Nagaraja Gupta, Secretary of Vivekananda Vidyakendra. On Monday at 6 am, special decoration for Vishwaroopa Darshan will be performed. Devotees are invited to participate.

### Worker dies after getting stuck between hydraulic stones

**Bengaluru**

A 25-year-old labourer died after getting trapped between hydraulic stones at SLV Granites Factory near Machohalli Gate in Nelamangala taluk on Saturday. The deceased has been identified as Zubin Nath, a native of Assam. He was reportedly pouring grease into a machine when he accidentally got stuck between the hydraulic stones, sustaining critical injuries. Co-workers alerted authorities immediately. Police from Madanayakanahalli station visited the spot and conducted an investigation. The body was shifted to Nelamangala General Hospital for postmortem examination. A case has been registered against the factory management, owned by Ramesh, and further inquiry is underway.

# Retired officer given promotion, shows govt's incompetence: R Ashoka

Ashok questions government's credibility after retired officer receives official promotion

**BENGALURU**

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Saturday alleged gross administrative lapses after the state government reportedly promoted a retired KAS officer in its latest official order.

The state recently issued an order promoting 20 KAS officers, including several senior officials. However, Ashoka claimed that the list also featured H.L. Nagaraj, who had voluntarily retired from service and is now known as Shri Nischalanandanath Swamiji after embracing a spiritual life.

In a post on X, Ashoka questioned Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's leadership and the functioning of the administration. "Do you know what level of incompetence your government has reached? You have given promotional privileges even to a person who has voluntarily retired and taken sanyasa," he said. He alleged that despite retiring and assuming religious duties, the officer continues to appear as serving in official records.

Ashoka further asked whether ministers and officials review files before signing them. "If the government does not even know which officers are in service and who have retired, how can people have faith in governance and development?" he said.

Calling the incident more than an accidental error, Ashoka described it as evidence of systemic collapse. He criticised the government for what he termed repeated blunders and demanded accountability.

The BJP leader also targeted the Congress government over its 1,000 days in office, alleging that beyond implementing its five guarantee schemes, no significant development initiatives had been introduced. He claimed price rise and corruption had marked the tenure, and urged the Chief Minister to take responsibility for the alleged administrative failures.

# Women gang enters apartments as sellers, walks away with cash and gold

**Inspite of police creating awareness among residents about permitting strangers to apartments, ignorance has caused disasters.**

**BENGALURU**

A well-organised gang of women thieves has reportedly surfaced in Bengaluru, targeting apartment complexes by posing as vendors and executing swift, coordinated thefts. In a recent case in Yeshwanthpur, six women allegedly decamped with cash and gold ornaments from an apartment after entering the premises under the guise of selling artificial jewellery.

The incident occurred at Golden Apartment in Yeshwanthpur. According to residents, the group claimed they were selling North Karnataka-style artificial jewellery and approached the building as part of routine door-to-door sales. Their approach initially appeared harmless.

When the women arrived at the entrance, the security guard refused to allow all six inside at once. Sensing resistance, four of them remained near the gate and deliberately engaged the guard in conversation, effectively distracting him. Meanwhile, the other two women quietly slipped inside the apartment complex without drawing attention.

Once inside, the duo allegedly targeted a ground-floor residence. In a matter of minutes, they stole around Rs 40,000 in cash along with gold jewellery. The theft was carried out swiftly and methodically, ensuring minimal suspicion. After completing the act, the two women exited the building and regrouped with the others before fleeing together.

Residents discovered the theft later and informed the police. CCTV cameras installed in the apartment complex have captured clear visuals of the gang's movements and strategy. Police are analysing the footage to identify the accused and track their whereabouts.

> Police have urged apartment residents and security personnel to exercise strict vigilance and avoid allowing unknown individuals inside without proper verification. Despite repeated awareness campaigns, officials say negligence continues to make residential complexes vulnerable. Investigation is underway to trace the gang and prevent similar incidents elsewhere in the city.

## Fake CM transfer note goes viral, FIR filed

**BENGALURU**

An FIR has been registered at the Vidhana Soudha police station after a fake transfer note purportedly issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) went viral on social media.

The complaint was filed by Arun Furtado, Joint Secretary (Administration) to the Chief Minister, against unknown persons. Police have booked a case under Sections 336(3), 336(4), and 340(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, alleging fabrication and circulation of false official communication.

According to the complaint, the transfer note carried no official number or date and was not recorded in the e-filing system of the Chief Minister's Secretariat. Authorities clarified that no such transfer order had been issued and termed the document completely fake. The complaint stated that the act appeared intended to tarnish the image of the Chief Minister and the state government.

The viral letter claimed that Dr K Mohan, Health and Family Welfare Officer of Mandya district, had been transferred and appointed as Deputy Commissioner of Excise, Mysore Rural. The alleged order sparked political reactions, with BJP MLA Sunil Kumar criticising the government and sharing the letter on social media. He described it as an example of "misguided administration" and questioned the legality of assigning a health department officer to the excise department, calling it a violation of cadre rules.

However, the CMO promptly dismissed the letter as fabricated and lodged a police complaint. Following this, an FIR was registered and an investigation launched to trace those responsible for creating and circulating the fake document.

Police are now examining digital evidence and social media trails to identify the source of the forged note and take appropriate legal action.

## CAT dismisses IPS officer Vartika Katiyar's plea against transfer

**BENGALURU**

IPS officer Vartika Katiyar has suffered a setback after the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) dismissed her plea challenging the state government's transfer order. Katiyar, who was serving as Deputy Inspector General of Police of the Ballari zone, was transferred to the Directorate of Civil Rights Enforcement on January 7 and subsequently moved the tribunal questioning the decision. After hearing arguments from both sides, the tribunal upheld the transfer and rejected her petition. The transfer followed violence in Ballari on January 1, when clashes erupted between supporters of Congress MLA Nara Bharat Reddy and Gangavathi MLA Gali Janardhan Reddy over installation of a Maharishi Valmiki banner. The unrest escalated into riots, leaving a Congress worker dead. Ballari SP Pawan Nezjur was suspended earlier.

# KSRTC launches special weekend package tours from Bengaluru

**BENGALURU**

The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) has introduced special weekend package tours from Bengaluru, offering convenient and affordable travel options for tourists and pilgrims. The services will operate every Saturday and Sunday, as well as on select special days. Entrance fees and food expenses are not included in the package cost.

According to an official press note, the initiative has received an encouraging response, prompting KSRTC to continue and expand the service. Both Rajahamsa and Ashwamedha category buses will operate on popular tourist and pilgrimage circuits across Karnataka.

Under the Bengaluru–Gaganachukki Package (Rajahamsa Service), passengers will cover a 340-km route including Somnathapura, Talakadu, Madhyaranga and Barachukki before reaching Gaganachukki. Introduced on July 5, 2025, the fare is Rs 750 for adults and Rs 600 for children.

The same Gaganachukki circuit is also available under the Ashwamedha Service, launched on July 20, 2024, with fares fixed at Rs 600 for adults and Rs 450 for children.

The Bengaluru–Chikka Tirupathi Package (Ashwamedha Service), introduced on June 28, 2025, covers a 270-km circuit including Chikka Tirupati, Kotilingeshwara, Bangaru Tirupati, Avani, Mulbagal, Kurudumale and Kolar. The fare is Rs 600 for adults and Rs 450 for children.

Another option is the Bengaluru–Melkote Package (Ashwamedha Service), a 350-km route covering Srirangapatna, Kallahalli and Melkote. Launched on May 31, 2025, fares are Rs 670 for adults and Rs 500 for children.

Passengers can book tickets through www.ksrtc.in or www.ksrtc.karnataka.gov.in. For details, KSRTC has provided helpline numbers for assistance.

## Leopard injures zoo caretaker during cage cleaning

**BENGALURU**

A 48-year-old animal caretaker was injured after a leopard attacked him during routine cleaning work at Bannerghatta Biological Park on Saturday. The injured staff member, identified as Shantappa, was working at the rehabilitation centre inside the zoo premises, which falls under the Bannerghatta Police Station limits. According to officials, the incident occurred while staff were cleaning a leopard enclosure. As part of standard safety procedure, the leopard had been shifted from its original cage to an adjoining enclosure before the cleaning began. However, during the process, the animal reportedly pushed its paw through the iron mesh barrier and suddenly attacked Shantappa, scratching him with its claws. The attack left Shantappa with injuries to his cheek and neck, causing bleeding and shock. Fellow staff members immediately responded, provided first aid, and rushed him to a nearby private hospital for treatment. Hospital sources said his condition is stable and he is under observation. Police have been informed about the incident and preliminary inquiries are underway to ascertain the sequence of events and review adherence to safety protocols at the facility.

## Bank manager arrested for stealing pledged gold worth Rs 4.12 crore

**BENGALURU**

An assistant manager of Indian Bank has been arrested for allegedly stealing 787 grams of gold ornaments pledged by customers, valued at Rs 4,12,65,000.

The accused, identified as Kiran Kumar, was working at the Girinagar branch of Indian Bank under the Girinagar police station limits. According to police, he exploited his access to locker keys used for storing gold pledged by customers. Taking advantage of the trust placed in him, he allegedly removed small quantities of gold from different packets in the absence of the branch manager to avoid suspicion.

Investigations revealed that Kiran Kumar was addicted to online betting and gambling, which allegedly drove him to commit the theft. The crime came to light when a customer visited the bank to reclaim pledged gold and discrepancies were noticed during verification.

Following a complaint, police registered an FIR and questioned the accused, who later confessed to the crime. During the probe, it was found that the stolen gold had been pledged at various private financial institutions, including Manappuram Finance, Muthoot Mini Finance and Muthoot Fincorp, to raise money. The funds were reportedly lost in online betting activities.

Police said around 700 grams of gold have been recovered so far, while efforts are underway to seize the remaining quantity. Authorities also stated that one of the finance firms did not initially cooperate during seizure proceedings, prompting legal steps. The accused has been taken into custody and further investigation is in progress.

## Tenant alleges harassment, theft and forced eviction by house owner

**BENGALURU**

A dispute between a tenant and a house owner in Vidyaranyapura has escalated into a police case, with both parties accusing each other of harassment and misconduct.

Madhu, a real estate entrepreneur and YouTube anchor, filed a complaint at the Vidyaranyapura Police Station against her house owner Venkatesh and his family, alleging intimidation, harassment and theft. She stated that she had taken a 1 BHK house on a two-year lease about 10 months ago by paying Rs 2.5 lakh.

According to her complaint, the house owner and his wife later began demanding money on interest. She claimed to have lent them Rs 2 lakh initially, which was returned, but alleged that they continued seeking more financial assistance. When she refused to lend additional amounts without proper assurance, she said tensions escalated.

Madhu alleged that water supply to the house was deliberately stopped, the gate was forcibly locked while she was inside, and she was subjected to verbal abuse. She further claimed that legal notices were sent to pressure her into vacating the premises before the lease period ended.

In a serious allegation, she stated that on February 11, seven persons entered her house, threatened her, snatched her mobile phone, and took away Rs 2 lakh in cash and 7 grams of gold ornaments. She also alleged that her household items were thrown outside.

**CONTROLING STREET DOG MENACE**

# *No more random feeding of stray dogs, GBA enforces strict rules with 450 official feeding centres*

**BENGALURU**

In a significant step to address public safety concerns, the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) has introduced strict regulations on feeding stray dogs, allowing the practice only at officially designated centres across the city. Feeding dogs in any other location will now attract penalties.

The move follows a rise in stray dog attacks and recurring disputes between animal feeders and residents. Officials said the structured system aims to balance animal welfare with public safety, cleanliness and better management of stray dog populations, given their strong territorial behaviour.

GBA has identified 450 authorised feeding centres spread across its five zones. Bengaluru East has 150 centres, Central 90, West 85, North 70 and South 55. Signboards will be installed at these locations to guide feeders.

Under the new guidelines, food must not be placed on roads, pavements or footpaths. Feeding in areas causing public nuisance is strictly prohibited and will invite fines. Those feeding dogs are responsible for maintaining cleanliness at the designated spots and are advised to do so during low-traffic hours to avoid inconvenience to the public.

Authorities noted that indiscriminate feeding often results in dogs gathering in multiple locations, heightening the risk of territorial aggression and attacks. Complaints about hygiene issues and obstruction of public spaces also prompted the crackdown.

Officials emphasised that the objective is not to discourage feeding but to regulate it in a systematic manner that ensures safety, reduces conflict and promotes responsible coexistence between citizens and stray animals.

## QUICK READ

### Helium gas leak burns Belthangady shop

**BELTHANGADY**

A fire broke out in Belthangady town early Saturday morning after a helium gas leak at KAF Creative Art & Craft Store, owned by Muhammad Samil. The incident occurred around 7:30 am on the first floor of Heraje Complex while balloons were being filled for a program. The shop was completely destroyed. Two workers escaped unharmed. Fire brigade personnel, assisted by locals, quickly controlled the blaze, though nearby shops suffered minor damage. Hundreds gathered at the scene, temporarily disrupting traffic. A shopkeeper fainted during the fire and was hospitalized, but no major injuries were reported.

### Dr. Madhu Prasad appointed senior head teacher

**HUNSUR**

Dr. Madhu Prasad, previously the head teacher at H. PBS School, has been promoted to senior head teacher. The appointment was honored by the school's S.D.M.C. teachers and members in a small ceremony. S.D.M.C. President Shubha A.S., Vice President Mohammed Rafique S., and teachers including Veena Na, Narasimha Jayaramegowda, and Kasima S.D.M.C. members were present. Other staff, such as Pallavi, Chandana, Nirmala, Lakshmi, Aisha Banu, Manjula, Noor Sabha, and several teachers including Jayaramegowda, Arokyameri, Dr. Chaluvraj, Somasunder, and Shilpa, attended to congratulate Dr. Prasad.

### Villagers catch thief, hand him over to cops

**SHIVAMOGGA**

In Honkeri village, villagers caught a man attempting to steal in broad daylight, beat him, and handed him over to the police.

A local farmer had kept Rs 50,000 in cash from selling jaggery, along with gold and other valuables, at home. Thieves broke windows and doors to steal the cash and jewellery. Suspicious villagers noticed strangers and rushed inside, catching one man with the stolen goods. The villagers tied him to a pole and confronted him; he denied the theft, but evidence proved otherwise.

The thief, identified as Suresh, was later taken into custody by the Sagar Rural Police and is being questioned. The prompt action by villagers helped recover the stolen property and prevent further loss.

# Mass Hanuman Chalisa recitation fills Mysuru with devotion

Ganapati Sachchidananda Swamiji inaugurated the programme, leading nearly two hours of Sundarakanda recitation focused rounds of Hanuman Chalisa

**MYSURU**

More than fifty thousand devotees gathered in Mysuru on Saturday to take part in a massive recitation of Shri Hanuman Chalisa, filling the city with devotion and spiritual energy for the welfare of society.

The event was organised by Sri Avadhuta Dattapeeth at the Maharaja College Grounds, where people from different parts of Karnataka and beyond assembled in a rare show of faith. Over fifty thousand voices joined together in prayer, creating a powerful and peaceful atmosphere.

The programme was inaugurated by Ganapati Sachchidananda Swamiji, who began the recitation with the chant "Rama Lakshman Janaki Jai Bolo Hanuman Ki". The chanting, along with verses from the Sundarakanda, continued without pause for nearly two hours. During this time, eighteen rounds of the Hanuman Chalisa were recited with deep concentration.

Before the main programme, a Pavamana Homa was performed by the seers to seek peace and well-being for farmers, soldiers, and ordinary citizens. Several public representatives, cultural figures, and devotees welcomed the spiritual leaders and offered their respects.

The grounds turned saffron as devotees waved flags, sang, and danced in devotion. Volunteers managed the crowd, while drinking water, medical care, and prasad were provided. Police ensured security throughout the event. The gathering concluded peacefully with the national anthem, leaving participants spiritually fulfilled.

*MP alleged weakened law and order, internal power struggles, and scams in treasury, Valmiki, MUDA, and excise, citing mismanagement*

# Opposition calls government event a painful show

**SHIVAMOGGA**

BJP MP B. Y. Raghavendra criticised the state government's proposed thousand-day Sadhana Samavesh in Haveri, calling it a "Yatana Samavesh" that reflects public suffering rather than achievement. He urged the government to release a white paper explaining its financial position and development record.

Addressing a press conference, Raghavendra said people across Karnataka are facing growing hardships since the present government came to power. He claimed development exists only on paper, while contractors are struggling due to unpaid bills. He alleged that around 60 percent of eligible youth are not receiving stipends under the Yuvanidhi scheme and that farmer suicides have increased in several districts.

The MP further alleged that law and order has weakened and internal power struggles have increased. He listed several alleged scams, including treasury-related issues, Valmiki, MUDA and excise cases, accusing the government of mismanagement and appeasement politics. Raghavendra said funds under the Grihalakshmi scheme remain unaccounted, while transport operators are owed large dues under the Shakti scheme, leading to the closure of hundreds of rural bus routes. This, he said, has badly affected students and villagers. He also accused the government of delaying benefits under the Annabhagya scheme and diverting SCP-TSP funds meant for Dalit welfare. He questioned the decision to hold the event in Haveri, a district affected by farmer suicides, and cited a CAG report pointing to a major revenue deficit. He alleged rising liquor sales, poor jail management, and declining safety for women. MLA S. N. Channabasappa and district leaders N. K. Jagadish, D. S. Arun and others were present.

# Mangaluru hosts free health camp for residents

**MANGALURU**

A free health check-up camp was organized in Mangaluru under the joint efforts of All India Bari Parishad, Yenepoya Medical Institute Deralakatte, and Nalapad Kunil Towers. The program aimed to raise awareness about health and encourage preventive care among residents.

Dr. Reshma, Senior Resident of Yenepoya Medical College Community Medicine, stressed the importance of maintaining good health and highlighted the need for awareness programs in every town. "Health is more important than anything else, and these camps help prevent problems before they arise," she said.

The program was inaugurated by Abdul Latif, who explained the purpose and necessity of the initiative. All India Bari Parishad President U.H. Khalid Ujire presided over the event, urging participants to take full advantage of the free services offered.

Officials and dignitaries attending included Social Welfare Department retired officer Yusuf Waktar, Nalapad Kunil Towers 'A' Block President Asif Khan, 'B' Block President Muhammad Qasim, Yenepoya Medical College Health Inspector Aisha Perne, Coordinator Abdul Razak, Dr. Siddique Addur, Hamid, and Habib Rahman.

All India Bari Parishad General Secretary Ibrahim Nadupadau welcomed the attendees, while Treasurer Nisar F. Muhammad proposed the vote of thanks. Vice President Sufi Nasir compered the program.

The camp featured sessions on various aspects of human health. A large number of people participated, receiving check-ups and guidance on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Attendees expressed appreciation for the initiative and the expert advice provided during the event.

# Contractors to protest over pending payments

**SHIVAMOGGA**

Thousands of contractors to gather at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on March 5 to demand the release of Rs 37,000 crore owed to them by the state government, officials said. The protest highlighted growing frustration over unpaid dues from 2022-23 to 2025-26.

R. Manjunath, president of the State PWD Contractors' Association, said that despite repeated meetings with the Chief Minister, ministers, and department secretaries, no progress had been made. "For over two and a half years, the Chief Minister has not held any official meetings with us. Scheduled meetings were postponed indefinitely without reason," he said.

Manjunath criticized a recent trend of awarding package tenders to select contractors, which he said favored outsiders over local contractors. "Kalyana Karnataka alone received contracts worth around Rs 5,000 crore. This practice is causing injustice to local contractors," he added.

Many contractors have mortgaged homes, land, and jewelry to continue work, relying on pending government payments. The association has submitted a 100-page report to the state Chief Secretary detailing the dues, but officials say nothing has changed.

The protest received widespread support, following press conferences in eight districts to raise awareness. Around 25,000 to 30,000 contractors were expected to participate in the strike, demanding immediate action on the long-standing payments issue.

Several district and state office bearers attended, including Dhanasekar, N. Manjunath, P. Subrahmanya, P. S. Girishrao, Syed Nafeez, Shivaraj, Hemanth Kumar, K. Manjunath, Yatish, Basavaraj, and Satish.

# Move to merge panchayats with Maddur municipality

**MANDYA**

District In-charge Minister N. Chaluvarayaswamy said discussions will be held at the government level to include nearby Gram Panchayats in Maddur Municipality as part of plans to upgrade it into a municipal corporation.

Chairing a preliminary meeting with villagers of Gejjalagere at the Maddur Tourist Mandir, the minister said the proposal involves merging four Gram Panchayats — Goravanahalli, Chamanahalli, Somanahalli, and Gejjalagere — with Maddur Municipality. He assured that the process would be carried out strictly as per legal provisions.

Chaluvarayaswamy said he would soon convene a meeting with the Chief Minister, district MLAs, and officials to review the demands and take necessary action. "We have listened to the concerns of villagers from all four Gram Panchayats and have accepted their requests. Further steps will be taken after detailed discussions," he stated. He also appealed to residents to withdraw ongoing protests, assuring them that their concerns would be addressed responsibly.

Maddur MLA K.M. Udaya, District Collector Dr. Kumar, Zilla Panchayat CEO K.R. Nandini, District Superintendent of Police Dr. Shobha Rani, and Tahsildar Parushram Sattigeri were present at the meeting along with local residents.

The proposed merger is expected to strengthen civic infrastructure and improve development planning in Maddur taluk.

**Ganapati Sachchidananda Swamiji inaugurated the programme, leading nearly two hours of Sundarakanda recitation and eighteen focused rounds of the Hanuman Chalisa**

### Minister Launches Poster for Mandya Job Fair

District In-charge Minister S. Chaluvarayaswamy unveiled the poster for the Mandya job fair scheduled on February 21 at Mandya University. The poster was released at Maddur Tourist Mandir in the presence of district officials and public representatives. The minister said reputed companies will take part, offering job opportunities in various sectors. He urged youth to attend in large numbers and benefit from the event. Maddur MLA K.M. Udaya, District Commissioner Dr. Kumar, Zilla Panchayat CEO K.R. Nandini, and SP Dr. Shobha Rani were present. Officials said the fair aims to connect job seekers with employers.

# Hunsur Banks launch camp for financial awareness

**HUNSUR**

An awareness camp was held in Hunsur as part of the "Financial Literacy Week" organized by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the District Guide Bank. The event aimed to educate customers on responsible banking and secure financial practices.

District Guide Bank Chief Manager N.P. Krishnamurthy inaugurated the program at the CTRI auditorium by planting a tree. Speaking to attendees, he highlighted the importance of financial literacy, proper savings habits, digital banking, and government-sponsored schemes. He also explained KYC procedures, including e-KYC and c-KYC, and their benefits for customers.

The camp focused on preventing online fraud, money-mule accounts, and safe digital transactions in line with RBI guidelines. Bank officials clarified doubts about cyber fraud, OTP security, UPI transactions, and other secure banking practices, helping customers better protect their accounts.

Representatives from major banks including SBI, Canara Bank, Karnataka Gramin Bank, and Bank of Baroda were present. Karnataka Gramin Bank Assistant General Manager Pramod Navani and Central Tobacco Research Institute Head Shri Ramakrishnan also attended. Bank officials Venkat Rao, Anil, Rajesh, and Mohan Kumar participated in organizing and guiding the attendees.

Officials said the camp aimed to increase customer confidence in modern banking, promote financial inclusion, and ensure safe use of digital payment systems, especially as more people adopt online banking.

## COLORS OVER VIJAYANAGAR

# *Colorful kites brighten Hampi festival skies*

**VIJAYANAGAR**

The Hampi Festival-2026 took off with a spectacular kite festival at Vijayanagar College Grounds on Saturday, celebrating the historic glory of Vijayanagar. The event was inaugurated by MLA H.R. Gaviyappa, drawing a cheerful crowd of kite lovers and tourists.

Organized by the Kannada and Culture Department along with the Vijayanagar District Administration, the festival attracted hundreds of participants from early morning. Bright and colorful kites of all shapes and sizes filled the sky, creating a lively and playful scene. Children and adults alike were delighted to watch the sky come alive with fluttering kites. The tricolor kites carrying the message "Vasudaiva Kutumbum" and sea octopus-shaped kites were a special delight for children. Spectacular large kites from the Bangalore Kite Club and artists from Punjab, Gujarat, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh stole the show. Among them were a giant red octopus stretching tens of feet, a leopard, and a monkey-shaped kite that seemed to leap across the sky, mesmerizing young spectators.

Deputy Commissioner Kavita S. Mannikeri, Sub-Divisional Officer Vivek, Municipal Council President Rupesh Kumar, Urban Development Fund Project Director Manohar, Municipal Commissioner Shivakumar, and V.K. Rao from the Bangalore Kite Club attended the inauguration, adding prestige to the festival.

The festival not only entertained visitors but also highlighted the cultural pride of Vijayanagar. Locals and tourists cheered for the creative displays, capturing photos and enjoying the vibrant atmosphere.

# Kurugodu Utsav on Feb 15–16

**BALLARI**

The district administration, District Panchayat, and the Department of Kannada and Culture, Bengaluru, have organized the Kurugodu Utsav on February 15 and 16.

On Feb 16 at 6:00 PM, the inauguration ceremony will be held at the Sri Dodda Basaveshwara stage near Sri Khaderlinga Dargah on Kampli Road, with the Hon. Minister for Housing, Wakf, and Minorities Welfare and Ballari District In-Charge Minister B. Ed. Jameer Ahmad Khan presiding over the event. Other dignitaries attending include S. Shivraj Tangadagi, Minister for Welfare of Backward Classes and Kannada and Culture Department; H. K. Patil, Minister for Law, Judicial Rights, Parliamentary Affairs, Legislation, and Tourism; Labor Minister Santosh Lad S., who will also be present.

Lokayukta Minister Satish Jarakiholi will participate as a special guest and release the book "Kurugodu Utsav.

## QUICK READ

### Leopard rescued after falling into well

**TUMKUR**

A leopard searching for food fell into a well on the outskirts of Tumkur, creating a tense situation for locals. The well was in the garden of Karthik, a BESCOM employee, whose family heard the animal's cries and alerted the forest department. Forest Officer Madhu and Zonal Forest Conservator Bharat led a rescue operation to safely lift the trapped leopard. Thousands gathered near the site, prompting police and forest staff to manage the crowd and calm the animal. The operation successfully ensured the leopard's safety, avoiding any harm to people or wildlife.

### Three killed in Yadgir road accident

**YADGIR**

A tragic road accident near Jadacharla claimed the lives of three people when a cruiser vehicle hit a roadside barrier. The victims were identified as Rama Reddy (52), his wife Megha (50) from Gogi village, Shahapur taluk, and Rama Reddy's mother-in-law Mahadevappa (65) from Vijayapura district. The family was traveling to visit Srisaila Mallikarjuna temple after a grandson's Javala program. Officials suspect the driver fell asleep, causing the crash. Five other passengers were injured and are receiving treatment at a local hospital. The incident has left the community in shock and mourning.

# Simple mass marriages bring happiness to society: U.T. Khader

The district administration, panchayat, and minority welfare department, guided by MLA Iqbal Hussain, organized the event witnessed by thousands of residents

**RAMANAGARA**

Assembly Speaker U.T. Khader said that simple and mass marriages form the foundation of a strong society. Speaking at a mass marriage program in Yarab Nagar, he wished that the newlyweds become examples of happy and ideal married life for others.

The event was organized by the district administration, district panchayat, and minority welfare department under the guidance of local MLA Iqbal Hussain.

Many couples from Ramanagara, Channapatna, Magadi, Kanakapura, and Harohalli taluks participated, while families, relatives, and thousands of residents witnessed the ceremony.

Khader emphasized that married couples should live together happily, fulfilling the purpose of such programs. He praised MLA Iqbal Hussain for supporting economically weak families and arranging simple weddings that ease financial burdens.

Municipal Administration Minister Rahim Khan highlighted that rising marriage costs make simple weddings necessary.

He said mass marriages reduce wasteful spending, help poor families, and promote peaceful lives.

He also spoke against dowry, calling it a harmful practice. "Islam does not support dowry. Those who believe in Allah should stop demanding it," he said.

The ceremony featured blessings from dignitaries, religious leaders, and elders, including KPCC Vice President Syed Ziaullah, former MLA K. Raju, and Ramanagara Urban Development Authority Chairman A.B. Chethan Kumar.

Each couple received practical and festive gifts. Brides were given four pairs of sarees and anklets, while grooms received jubba, pyjama, jacket, hat, watch, blanket, and daily-use utensils. The gifts and blessings left the newlyweds joyful and hopeful as they began their married life.

The mass marriage program highlighted unity, simplicity, and social responsibility. By encouraging modest weddings, the event set an example for families, showing that happiness and harmony matter more than lavish celebrations.

# Millet purchase rules announced for farmers

**HUNSUR**

**Harish Gowda warned officials against overcharging, emphasized registered farmers' participation, proper contract worker procedures, and promised strict action for complaints of demanding extra money.**

MLA J.D. Harish Gowda urged officials to ensure farmers face no inconvenience at the millet support price centers, while inaugurating the 2025-26 purchase center at the city's APMC premises. He emphasized that deductions from millet should not exceed 640 grams per quintal, even when damaged grains or other materials are added.

This year, the state government plans to purchase 60 lakh quintals of quality millet. The procurement will be managed through a local agency in the district. Farmers had complained last year that up to 4 kg per quintal was deducted for various reasons, causing losses.

Harish Gowda warned that officials must not deduct more than the prescribed amount under any circumstances. He also stressed that registered farmers must be allowed to participate on the scheduled day, and workers hired under contract must follow proper procedures. Any complaints of farmers being asked for extra money will result in strict action.

Speaking at the program, Purchase Center District Manager B.S. Kiran and Purchase Center Officer Michael Fernandes outlined the operational procedures.

The inauguration was attended by TAPCMS Director Govindegowda, Taluk Food and Civil Supplies Chief Lakshmi, APMC Secretary Nagesh, and local farmer leaders.

Officials assured farmers that this year's millet procurement would be transparent and fair, aiming to restore trust and ensure timely payments.

*Devanahalli inspector allegedly accepted a Rs 5,000 bribe to issue an unauthorized inspection report, causing confusion for local authorities*

# RTO inspector accused of bribe for illegal report

**CHIKKABALLAPURA**

An RTO inspector from Devanahalli has come under scrutiny for issuing a vehicle inspection report outside her jurisdiction, raising allegations of bribery. The report concerned a tractor (registration KA 40, TB2054) involved in an accident handled by Gauribidanur Rural Police in Chikkaballapura district.

The Gauribidanur Police had requested the Chikkaballapura District RTO to issue the inspection report. However, Devanahalli Police Inspector Shwetha, not authorized in Chikkaballapura, allegedly accepted a Rs 5,000 bribe from an RTO agent and issued the report illegally. Once the irregularity surfaced, the police were instructed to return the report, creating confusion for the local authorities.

The Gauribidanur police initially accepted the unauthorized report and returned the tractor to the station. After Shwetha demanded the return of her documents, the vehicle was brought back and parked at the police station. Meanwhile, the local police have formally requested a fresh inspection report from the Chikkaballapura District RTO.

The Chikkaballapura RTO confirmed that they will escalate the matter to senior officials for further investigation. Authorities are concerned that the misuse of power and bribery could set a dangerous precedent if not addressed promptly. The incident has sparked questions about accountability and proper adherence to jurisdictional protocols within the transport and police departments.

## Minister visits hospital after children fall ill

**HIRIYUR**

Minister D. Sudhakar visited Maradihalli Hospital in Hiriyur on Friday to check on the well-being of 41 children from Kittur Ranichennamma Murarji Residential Home in Aimangala village, who fell ill after consuming contaminated food.

Seven of the children are in critical condition and were shifted to Chitradurga District Hospital for specialized care, while the remaining children continue treatment at Maradihalli Hospital.

During his visit, the minister met with anxious parents and reassured them about the children's condition, emphasizing that officials are taking all necessary steps to ensure their safety. He expressed courage and concern, highlighting the importance of immediate medical attention and proper monitoring of hostel food services.

## Vijayapura hosts grand Dog Show 2026 event

**VIJAYAPURA**

The Dog Show–2026 was held successfully in Vijayapura, attracting pet lovers, families, and youth from across the district. Organized under the guidance of the Government of Karnataka and jointly hosted by the District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, City Corporation, Police Department, and the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, the event created a festive and educational atmosphere.

The show took place at the Police Parade Ground on Solapur Road and featured a stunning display of various dog breeds. Visitors enjoyed demonstrations of training skills, obedience competitions, and security drills, highlighting the intelligence and discipline of the animals. Well-maintained and well-trained dogs received awards for their performance, adding excitement to the program.

Veterinarians conducted free health check-ups and offered guidance on responsible pet ownership, emphasizing the importance of proper care and welfare for animals. The event also aimed to raise public awareness about animal welfare and the benefits of adopting and caring for pets responsibly.

Organizers expressed their gratitude to all participating departments, competitors, and attendees for making the event a grand success. The Dog Show–2026 not only entertained the public but also strengthened the bond between humans and animals, encouraging ethical treatment and care of pets in the community.

# Gurukul College students shine in University rankings

**BHALKI**

Three students of Channabasaveshwara Gurukul First Grade College have been named among the top 10 performers at Gulbarga University.

Pallavi Vijayakumar Borale secured 6th place with 88.65 percent marks in Computer Science and won a gold medal. Rani Umesh Dadge achieved 3rd place with 89.01 percent, while Vanishree Ashok Rajole ranked 8th with 88.14 percent marks. Their outstanding performance has brought pride to the institution.

Principal Dr. Kiran Sajjanashetty congratulated the students for their achievement. Founder president Basavalinga Pattaddevaru, secretary Mahalinga Swamiji, administrator Mohana Reddy, and other staff expressed happiness over the students' success, highlighting the college's dedication to academic excellence.

The achievements reflect the commitment of both students and faculty to maintaining high educational standards and fostering talent in the region.

## Make Cleanliness a Daily Habit: District Commissioner Nagendra Prasad K.

**BALLARI**

The commitment to keeping Ballari clean should not be limited to words; it must become a daily practice, said District Commissioner Nagendra Prasad K.

He spoke while flagging off the marathon organized by the Bruhat Ballari City Corporation on Saturday at the Municipal College ground on Dr. Rajkumar Road, under the "Our Ballari – Clean Ballari" initiative for the year 2025–26.

He urged that only when the public adopts a disciplined lifestyle can the goals of the Swachh Bharat Mission be achieved. He called on everyone to join hands to achieve the goal of a completely clean India along with a free India.

He expressed his happiness that not only professional runners but also school and college students and the general public participated in large numbers in the marathon.

Bruhat Ballari City Corporation Mayor P. Gadeppa said that maintaining complete cleanliness in the city's 39 wards requires both the corporation's efforts and the active participation of the public. He emphasized that everyone should separate wet and dry waste at home and hand it over to the corporation's vehicles. He added that it is impossible to keep the entire city clean without public support.

**BUSINESS IMPACT SUSTAINABILITY**

# *State Conference highlights Innovative CSR for sustainability*

**CHITRADURGA**

A one-day state-level conference on "Innovative CSR Management Practices for Sustainable Development" was held at the Department of Commerce, Government First Grade College, Holalhere, under the PM-USHA scheme. The programme took place on the college campus and drew strong participation from students, teachers, and experts from across the state.

The conference was inaugurated in the presence of several distinguished guests. The chief guest, Prof. Srinivas K.T., Dean of the Department of Commerce and Management at Davangere University, delivered a detailed lecture on modern Corporate Social Responsibility practices. He explained how CSR has moved beyond charity and should be integrated into core business strategies to ensure long-term and sustainable development. The keynote address was delivered by Prof. B. Nagaraju, Senior Professor at the University of Mysore and Chairman and Liaison Officer of the Board of Studies. He spoke about social responsibility, the close bond between family and nature, and the present challenges faced in education, health, and environmental sectors. He also shared his views on India's future development path.

Presiding over the event, Prof. Kotrappa C.K. said such academic platforms play a vital role in promoting innovative CSR ideas. He urged students and faculty members to actively involve themselves in social and community-based activities.

Several resource persons, including Dr. Satyanarayana, Dr. Venkateshababu, Po. C.K. Maheswarappa, Prof. K. Ramarao, and Prof. Rajashekarappa, shared their insights on different aspects of CSR and sustainability.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice is hereby given to public at large **Mrs.Vidya C/O Pratap Ram,** Residing at No.66 Honnagana Gatti Lakshmi Layout, Tavarekere, Bengaluru North, Karnataka - 560091. She has lost the Registered Original Sale Deed of Doc No. BTM-1-01334-2020-21 dated on 10-08-2020 she has lost at Near Tavarekere bus stop, Bangalore Accordingly she has lodged the complainant on Bangalore City Police with E-Lost dated 24/01/2026 Report No.2025862/2026

**SCHEDULE PROPERTY :** All that piece and parcel of the Property bearing Site No.687 Southern Portion, Katha No.634, Assessment No.66. Situated at Tavarekere Village, Channenahalli Grama Panchahith, Tavarekere Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk, Measuring East to West : 40 feet and North to South 15 feet, in all measuring 600 Sq,ft bounded on **East by:** Road, **West by:** Site No. 699, **North by:** Same Site No687 Balance Northern Portion, **South by:** Site No.686. If anyone finding the aforesaid document is hereby requested to handover the same to our office at the address mentioned hereunder.

**HARISHA .S, Advocate**
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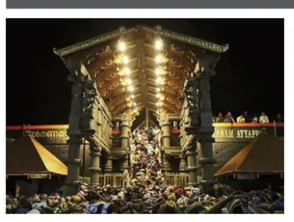
**Saroja Bai** W/o Basavaraj Nayak Mududi B Tandya Village, Arasikere Taluk, Hassan District 573119 I am requesting you to deliver our registered document right retirement letter **(No. ASK-1-04972-2019-2020)** dated 01-02-2026 at 12.00 noon at Mududi B Tandya. I have also filed a complaint in this regard at Gandasi Police Station, the complaint number is 2062089.If anyone finds it, please deliver it to my address or the nearest police station.

QUICK READ



## TDB Rejects False News On Ayyappa Sangamam

**Thiruvananthapuram**

The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) on Saturday called media reports about the Global Ayyappa Sangamam audit "baseless and wrong." The event was held on September 20, 2025, at Pamba for TDB's Platinum Jubilee. TDB accused some outlets of spreading false propaganda on spending, clarifying that the audit report and the Special Commissioner's report had no mention of a cot for Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. The Board said Rs 3,83,439 was for office furniture and guest house expenses, not for the CM.

## Delhi Freezes With Poor Air Quality

**New Delhi**

Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 11.8ºC on Saturday, 2.4 degrees below the season's average, the India Meteorological Department said. The maximum is expected to reach 24.8ºC with strong winds during the day. Humidity was 82 per cent at 8.30 am. The Central Pollution Control Board reported the air quality as "poor" with an AQI of 214. Delhiites are advised to take precautions, as AQI readings above 200 can affect health, especially for sensitive groups.

## UP Police To Greet Kashi Devotees Respectfully

**Varanasi**

For this Mahashivratri, UP Police will welcome Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham devotees with folded hands and address them as "sir" or "madam." About 15-20 lakh devotees are expected on Sunday. Officers have been trained in soft skills and instructed to avoid harsh language or abusive behavior. Special attention will be given to senior citizens, women, and people with disabilities. Police will also guide devotees for smooth darshan, while senior officials monitor conduct to ensure strict discipline for any misconduct.

# PM Modi Criticises Congress For Assam Neglect, Insurgency

### CM Himanta calls Centre's approval for Assam's first underwater road-rail tunnel a historic achievement

**GUWAHATI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday sharply criticised the Congress, saying it endangered Assam's security and promoted unrest. Speaking to BJP workers in Guwahati, he alleged that Congress focused on vote-bank politics and polarisation instead of the state's development. Modi said the party protected infiltrators while BJP is committed to ending illegal immigration, making the next five years crucial for Assam.

The Prime Minister warned of a new threat, calling it 'MMC' – Maoist, Muslim, Congress – and urged people to be aware. He added that even out of power, Congress remained dangerous, evident from recent statements by its leaders. Modi highlighted infrastructure achievements under BJP, noting that Congress built only three bridges over the Brahmaputra in seventy years, while BJP constructed five bridges in just ten years.

He said the BJP government has ensured all-round development in Assam, improving roads, bridges, and connectivity while maintaining peace and security. Modi emphasised that Congress's past rule left a legacy of fear and insecurity, whereas BJP's governance has focused on safety, progress, and welfare for all sections of society.

The rally showcased the party's confidence ahead of upcoming state elections, with Modi appealing to the people to recognise the BJP's work and reject divisive politics. He urged Assam residents to support initiatives that promote growth, peace, and stability, contrasting BJP's development record with Congress's alleged negligence.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday called the Centre's approval for India's first twin-tube underwater road-cum-rail tunnel a historic milestone. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by PM Narendra Modi, cleared the 33.7 km, four-lane corridor from Gohpur to Numaligarh, including a 15.79 km tunnel under the Brahmaputra, at Rs 18,662 crore. Sarma said the project will cut travel time from six hours to 20 minutes, boost trade, tourism, industrial growth, and improve logistics efficiency.

# Cong Celebrates T'gana Municipal Polls Victory

**NEW DELHI**

**Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge hailed the party's strong win in Telangana municipal elections, calling it a reflection of people's trust and praising the efforts of grassroots workers.**

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday congratulated the party's Telangana unit for its decisive victory in municipal elections, saying the mandate shows the public's trust in the party. The win strengthens the A Revanth Reddy-led government as the party secured over 1,300 of 2,582 wards in 116 municipalities, while the BRS won about 700 wards and the BJP around 275 wards.

Kharge took to X to express gratitude to Telangana Congress workers, calling their efforts commendable. He emphasised the party's commitment to a "Prajala Telangana," a state focused on social justice, economic empowerment, and continuous development for all 3.8 crore residents. The Congress chief said the results are a clear message of the people's faith in the party's governance and vision.

In the seven municipal corporations that went to polls, Congress won three and led in one, while the BJP achieved majorities in Karimnagar and Nizamabad. In Kothagudem, the Congress and CPI were in a closely fought contest, showing a competitive political landscape. The results indicate the Congress' growing organisational strength in local governance and its ability to connect with grassroots voters.

Kharge's statement highlighted that the victory was not just a win in numbers but a demonstration of the public's confidence in Congress policies, leadership, and its promises to deliver sustained growth and welfare for Telangana's people.

## Over 466 Day-Care Cancer Centres Now Operational

**NEW DELHI**

More than 466 Day Care Cancer Centres (DCCCs) are now operational across India, strengthening chemotherapy services at the district level, Union Health Ministry sources said. The initiative, announced in the 2025-26 Union Budget, aims to decentralise routine cancer treatment, making chemotherapy more accessible and reducing patients' dependence on tertiary hospitals in cities.

Cancer treatment typically requires multiple visits over months. For patients, especially in rural or economically weaker areas, repeated travel to urban hospitals can be physically exhausting and financially burdensome. Expenses for travel, accommodation, food, and loss of wages for both patients and caregivers add to the strain. DCCCs help ease this burden by providing treatment closer to home.

Before opening new centres, the ministry conducted a gap analysis with states and Union Territories, considering patient load, infrastructure, and cancer burden. Medical officers and staff nurses from selected districts received four- to six-week hands-on training at mentor institutes, including government medical colleges, regional cancer centres, and state cancer institutes.

*Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said using derogatory language against Shankaracharya amounts to verbal violence and sin*

## Akhilesh Yadav Condemns Derogatory Remarks Against Shankaracharya

**LUCKNOW**

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday condemned derogatory remarks against Shankaracharya, calling them both verbal violence and sinful. He said that not only the person who made the remarks but also those who applauded them would share the guilt. Yadav warned that BJP MLAs would face public disapproval for such actions, highlighting the accountability leaders hold toward citizens.

His remarks followed Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's Assembly statement that not everyone can use the title "Shankaracharya" and that religious decorum and the rule of law must be maintained. Adityanath's comments stemmed from a January 18 incident where Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati was stopped during the Magh Mela at Prayagraj for safety reasons. The CM emphasized strict crowd management at the Mela, attended by over 4.5 crore devotees, noting that entry through exit gates could cause stampedes.

Yadav criticised the administration, alleging corruption in compensation for Maha Kumbh-related deaths and questioning the moral authority of those who distort religious matters for political ends. He accused Adityanath of engaging in hate politics, turning culture into ego-driven vice, and permanently recording "indecent" remarks about Shankaracharya in the Assembly.

The SP chief's statement stressed that the use of religion for political leverage undermines human values. He warned that ego should not override humanity and that disrespect toward religious figures diminishes societal respect. Yadav's comments sought to hold political leaders accountable while defending religious dignity and advocating adherence to moral and legal norms during public events.

# TDB Rejects Media Claims On Ayyappa Sangamam Spending

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) on Saturday rejected media reports alleging audit irregularities in the Global Ayyappa Sangamam, calling them "factually incorrect and baseless." The event, held on September 20, 2025, at Pamba, was part of TDB's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. The Board manages several temples, including the Sabarimala Sree Ayyappa Temple.

In a statement, TDB clarified that neither the Devaswom audit report nor the Special Commissioner's report submitted to the Kerala High Court mentioned any expenditure on a cot for Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. The Rs 3,83,439 spent under "Furniture and Miscellaneous Items" was for the office complex and guest house. Renovation works at the Pamba Guest House were for general use, not special arrangements for the CM, the Board added.

Regarding the musical event, TDB explained that Ishaan Dev led a performance with over 25 artistes after "Nandagovindam Bhajans" declined the invitation. Payments were correctly credited to Ishaan Dev, and references to Nandagovindam in the audit were an inadvertent error. A total of Rs five crore was allocated under the 2025-26 budget head "Religious Convention & Discourse," with Rs three crore given in advance to the event agency, IIIC. Accommodation and GST expenses were also properly accounted for.

The Board denied allegations of funds misuse, inflated food costs, or failure to redeposit drawn money. Food served included devotees, workers, and daily wage staff, feeding more than double the estimated number. Former TDB president P S Prasanth said controversies arose from officials' negligence, calling the Sangamam a significant initiative showcasing Sabarimala globally.

## Pentagon Lists Alibaba, BYD before Trump-Xi Talks

**NEW DELHI**

The US Department of Defense has decided to include major Chinese firms such as Alibaba Group and BYD on its updated list of companies allegedly linked to China's military.

The revised "Chinese Military Companies" list, also known as the 1260H list and mandated by the US Congress, was submitted to the Federal Register on Friday. However, it was later removed from the Pentagon website at the department's request, with officials saying an updated version would be released next week.

The move comes weeks before US President Donald Trump is expected to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing, potentially heightening diplomatic tensions. Alongside Alibaba and BYD, search engine giant Baidu, biotechnology firm WuXi AppTec, Robo-Sense and BOE Technology were also reportedly added.

Being placed on the list does not automatically impose sanctions but can harm a company's reputation and signal possible future restrictions. WuXi AppTec could face stricter consequences under the US Biosecure Act, which bars federal agencies from working with designated biotechnology firms.

At the same time, the Pentagon removed memory chipmakers CXMT and YMTC from the list, surprising some observers.

Alibaba, BYD and Baidu denied the allegations, calling them unfounded and stating they are considering legal options to challenge the designation.

## Rival Student Groups Clash Over Journalist Assault Allegations

**NEW DELHI**

Tensions erupted at the University of Delhi when a protest turned chaotic, with rival student groups accusing each other of assault, including an alleged attack on a journalist.

A viral video shows a female journalist at the Faculty of Arts surrounded by shouting students, could not independently verify the full sequence of events leading to the confrontation.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) alleged that the journalist, associated with the YouTube channel Breaking Opinion, was assaulted during the protest.

ABVP Delhi State Secretary Sarthak Sharma called the incident "highly unfortunate," saying it exposed the violent tendencies of Left-wing student groups. The party demanded strict action from Delhi Police and the university administration against those responsible, claiming that such acts undermine media freedom, a pillar of democracy.

In response, the All India Students' Association (AISA) denied the allegations, saying their members were targeted while trying to protect the journalist.

AISA said "right-wing goons" assaulted their DU Secretary while shielding the journalist, and accused ABVP members of taking advantage of the situation.

The Left-affiliated group emphasised that the protest was linked to demands for UGC Equity Regulations and vowed to continue their campaign for the Rohith Act without intimidation.

The confrontation highlights ongoing tensions between student organisations at Delhi University over political and policy-related issues. While the exact trigger of the protest remains unclear, both sides have blamed each other for escalating the situation, with allegations of manhandling, intimidation, and violent behaviour circulating widely on social media.

University authorities and law enforcement are monitoring the situation closely.

HC ACTS TOUGH

# *Chhattisgarh High Court Orders Pension For Mother*

**RAIPUR**

The Chhattisgarh High Court on Saturday called it "highly unjust" that a 68-year-old mother was denied family pension after her son, a police constable, was killed in a Naxal attack. The bench of Chief Justice Ramesh Sinha and Justice Ravindra Kumar Agrawal directed the state government to decide her case within six weeks.

Filisita Lakra's 21-year-old son, Ignatius Lakra, of the 10th Battalion of Chhattisgarh Armed Force in Surajpur, died in 2002. After her husband, the first pension recipient, passed away in 2020, her pension was discontinued. Despite approaching authorities, she received no relief, prompting her 2021 petition to the High Court.

The state had argued that the Chhattisgarh Police Karmchari Varg Asadharan Parivar Nirvritti Vetan Niyam, 1965, did not allow pension to pass to the mother after the father's death. Filisita's counsel argued this was discriminatory, pointing out the 1963 Civil Services Rules allowed the mother to receive pension after the father's death.

The HC agreed with Filisita, noting the 1965 Rules should include provisions similar to the amended 1963 Rules of 1970, allowing the mother to receive the pension. "Denial of pension is highly unjust, especially when the son laid down his life in a Naxal attack," the court said.

The bench ordered that the pension sanctioned to the father under the 1965 Rules will now be payable to the mother. Authorities have been directed to consider and decide the matter within six weeks in line with the court's observations, ensuring justice for the bereaved mother.

## QUICK READ

### EU Must Activate Mutual Defence Pact: von der Leyen

**Munich**

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Saturday urged the European Union to operationalise its mutual defence clause enshrined in the bloc's founding treaty. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, she stressed that collective defence is a binding obligation, not a choice. Von der Leyen said the treaty commits member states to stand together in the face of aggression, describing it as Europe's pledge of "one for all and all for one." Her remarks come amid heightened security concerns across the continent and renewed calls for stronger European defence cooperation.

### Indian Student Reported Missing in California

**New York**

A 22-year-old Indian postgraduate student from Karnataka has been reported missing in California, authorities said. Saketh Sreenivasaiah, a student at the University of California, Berkeley, was last seen on Tuesday in the 1700 block of Dwight Way. According to source, his backpack containing his passport and laptop was later discovered on a doorstep in the Park Hills neighbourhood. The Indian Consulate in San Francisco has expressed deep concern and is coordinating with the family and local authorities. Police described him as 6 feet 1 inch tall, weighing about 73 kg, with short black hair and brown eyes.

### US Military Strike in Caribbean Kills Three

**Washington**

The U.S. military said it carried out a strike on a vessel in the Caribbean on Friday, resulting in the deaths of three people. In a post on social media platform X, the military stated the boat was involved in suspected drug trafficking operations. The incident marks the latest in a series of actions targeting alleged narco-trafficking vessels in the region in recent months. President Donald Trump's administration has highlighted such operations as part of its broader crackdown on illicit drug networks. Reuters could not independently verify the military's claims.

# BNP Thanks Modi, Seeks Constructive Engagement with India

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party thanked PM Modi for his wishes and expressed interest in strengthening ties with India

**DHAKA**

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Saturday thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his warm wishes following the party's historic election victory. The BNP expressed hope for "constructive engagement" with India to enhance their multifaceted relationship and ensure peace and stability in the region.

In a post on X, the BNP said, "Thank you very much, Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We greatly appreciate

your kind acknowledgement of Mr Tarique Rahman's leadership in securing the BNP's decisive win in the national elections. This outcome reflects the trust and confidence the people of Bangladesh have placed in our leadership and in the democratic process."

The party added that Bangladesh remains committed to democratic values, inclusivity, and progressive development for all citizens. It also emphasised advancing bilateral ties with India through mutual respect and sensitivity to each country's concerns.

PM Modi held a telephonic conversation with BNP chairman Tarique Rahman on Friday, congratulating him on the election triumph. Modi expressed India's support for Rahman's efforts to fulfil the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh and reaffirmed the commitment of both nations to peace, progress, and prosperity.

The BNP-led alliance won a decisive 210 seats, comfortably surpassing the majority mark and paving the way for forming a new government. Tarique Rahman, son of former President Ziaur Rahman and late Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, is set to take oath as Bangladesh's Prime Minister, marking the return of a male leader to the country after nearly 35 years.

## US Military Prepares for Possible Extended Iran Operations

**WASHINGTON**

The United States military is preparing for the possibility of sustained operations against Iran that could last for weeks, should President Donald Trump authorise military action, according to US officials familiar with the planning.

The preparations signal a potential escalation beyond previous limited strikes and come as diplomatic efforts continue. US and Iranian officials recently held talks in Oman aimed at reviving negotiations over Tehran's nuclear programme. However, Trump has indicated that reaching a deal has been difficult, warning that failure to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough could have "very traumatic" consequences.

In recent days, the Pentagon has reinforced its military presence in the Middle East, deploying an additional aircraft carrier along with thousands of troops, fighter aircraft and guided-missile destroyers. While the White House said Trump retains "all options" regarding Iran, the Pentagon declined to comment on specific operational plans.

Last year, US forces carried out a one-off strike on Iranian nuclear facilities under an operation dubbed "Midnight Hammer," prompting a limited retaliatory response from Tehran. Officials suggest that any future campaign could be broader in scope, potentially targeting Iranian state and security infrastructure beyond nuclear sites.

Analysts caution that a prolonged military campaign would carry significantly higher risks, given Iran's missile capabilities and its capacity to retaliate against US forces and regional allies, potentially triggering a wider Middle East conflict.

*Human rights organisations allege enforced disappearances in Balochistan, urging authorities to reveal detainees' whereabouts and ensure due process.*

# Rights Groups Demand Accountability in Balochistan

**QUETTA**

Human rights organisations have raised alarm over the alleged enforced disappearance of at least fourteen Baloch civilians in Pakistan's Balochistan province, accusing security forces of unlawful detentions and intimidation.

Paank, the human rights department of the Baloch National Movement, reported that 23-year-old Zulfiqar from the Tasp area of Panjgur district was allegedly taken by a Pakistan-backed armed group. The group also highlighted the case of Zakir Noor, a student from Panjgur, who was reportedly detained by state security personnel in Karachi on December 30 without warrant or due process. His whereabouts remain unknown, according to the organisation.

Another rights body, Baloch Voice for Justice (BVJ),

condemned what it described as the enforced disappearance of several members of a single family during a February 8 raid in Hub district. BVJ alleged that four brothers and several of their sons were detained, and claimed that women and children faced violence during the operation.

The group further cited additional cases in Awaran and Kalat districts, alleging the involvement of Pakistan's Frontier Corps and Military Intelligence in the detentions of three more youths.

Both organisations described enforced disappearance as a serious violation of international human rights law and called on Pakistani authorities to immediately disclose the detainees' locations and present them before a court. Pakistani authorities have not publicly responded to the allegations.

# EU Hails Bangladesh Polls as Democratic Milestone

**DHAKA**

European Union welcomes Bangladesh's competitive elections, terms them credible milestone for democratic restoration and rule of law reforms.

The European Union on Saturday described Bangladesh's recent parliamentary elections and referendum as a "pivotal step" toward restoring democratic governance and the rule of law, welcoming what it called a genuinely competitive and peaceful exercise.

In a preliminary assessment presented in Dhaka, the EU Election Observation Mission said the polls were credible and competently managed, with no direct observation of fraud or ballot stuffing. The mission acknowledged reports of irregularities in certain constituencies but stressed that complaints should be addressed through a transparent legal appeals process.

The BNP-led alliance secured a decisive victory, winning 210 seats and comfortably crossing the majority mark to form the next government. The EU noted that voters participated in large numbers and across diverse communities nationwide.

EU Chief Observer Ivars Ijabs said turnout figures should not be viewed in isolation, emphasising that broad participation across regions and communities was equally significant. He added that concerns raised by minority and indigenous groups would be detailed in the mission's final report, due later this year.

The EU also urged political stakeholders to cooperate in implementing constitutional and judicial reforms endorsed through the referendum. It reaffirmed readiness to work with the new government and support reform efforts grounded in democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law.

### Post-Poll Clashes in Bangladesh Leave One Dead

At least one person was killed and dozens injured in post-election violence in Bangladesh, as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party prepares to form the next government after its decisive victory in the 13th parliamentary polls. Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh alleged vote rigging in several constituencies and claimed its leaders and workers were attacked following the results. Local reports said 36 people were hurt in clashes linked to election disputes. In Munshiganj, a man died from head injuries sustained during a clash between rival BNP factions. Analysts say restoring law and order will be an immediate challenge for incoming leader Tarique Rahman.

# Georgieva to Visit Sri Lanka amid Recovery

**COLOMBO**

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva will undertake a two-day visit to Sri Lanka from February 16, marking her first trip to the island nation since it entered an IMF-supported bailout programme in March 2023.

During the visit, Georgieva is scheduled to meet government leaders and key stakeholders, assess the damage caused by Cyclone Ditwah, and discuss ways the IMF can further assist the country's recovery and long-term economic stability.

Sri Lanka secured a nearly USD 3 billion IMF bailout after declaring its first-ever sovereign default in April 2022. The programme aimed to stabilise the economy following an acute financial crisis that triggered widespread protests and led to a change in political leadership. India extended about USD 4 billion in assistance during the height of the crisis, helping the country manage severe shortages of fuel, food, and medicines.

Although the IMF-backed reforms helped restore macroeconomic stability, the austerity measures proved unpopular. Former president Ranil

**IMF reforms restored economic stability, but austerity was unpopular. In September 2024, Ranil Wickremesinghe was voted out, replaced by National People's Power, which continues the bailout despite prior criticism**

Wickremesinghe was voted out in the September 2024 election and replaced by the National People's Power government, which has opted to continue the bailout despite earlier criticism.

Sri Lanka is currently awaiting the sixth tranche of IMF assistance, delayed due to Cyclone Ditwah. The IMF has already disbursed USD 200 million under its rapid financing facility, while total recovery costs are estimated between USD 4 billion and USD 6 billion.

# Venezuela Releases 17 Prisoners as Amnesty Bill Debate Intensifies

**CARACAS**

Venezuela has released 17 political prisoners from a Caracas detention facility as lawmakers continue debating a landmark amnesty bill that could lead to the freedom of hundreds more. The move marks a significant step in efforts to dismantle what critics describe as decades of politically motivated prosecutions.

National Assembly President Jorge Rodríguez announced the releases, stating that the detainees were freed under the proposed Amnesty Law. He urged citizens to support a peaceful path toward democratic coexistence but did not disclose the identities of those released.

The legislation seeks to annul charges such as "treason," "terrorism," and spreading "hate," accusations widely used during the administrations of former presidents Nicolás Maduro and Hugo Chávez against critics and opposition figures. If enacted, the bill could pave the way for the release of activists, demonstrators and political leaders still imprisoned.

The amnesty initiative has gained prominence under interim President Delcy Rodríguez, who assumed office following Maduro's capture earlier this year. Her administration has framed the measure as part of broader reconciliation efforts.

However, human rights organisations caution that certain provisions—such as requiring detainees to formally request amnesty—may exclude many prisoners. Advocacy group Foro Penal reports that while hundreds have been freed since January, numerous political detainees remain behind bars.

As debate continues, families of prisoners say the bill represents a crucial test of Venezuela's commitment to reform and national reconciliation.

## SU DO KU

**Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?**

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Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

**Fill a 9×9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3×3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.**

**LUNAR RACE INTENSIFIES**

# *Musk, Bezos Compete To Reach Moon First*

**WASHINGTON**

The race to the moon is intensifying as U.S. billionaires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos push their companies to advance lunar missions ahead of China's planned 2030 astronaut landing. Both SpaceX and Blue Origin aim to establish a human presence on the moon and lead the next era of space exploration.

SpaceX, led by Elon Musk, plans to build "Moonbase Alpha" and place a satellite-launching device on the lunar surface. The base would support Musk's vision of a global AI-computing network connected to up to one million satellites. This marks a shift from his long-standing focus on Mars colonization, a goal he has pursued since founding SpaceX in 2002. Musk's renewed focus on the moon is also aimed at attracting investors ahead of SpaceX's planned IPO later this year, which could value the company at over $1 trillion.

Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin is also intensifying its lunar efforts, shifting from suborbital space tourism to its Blue Moon lander program. The company plans an uncrewed

moon mission this year as a precursor to future astronaut landings. Blue Origin recently sent its lander to NASA's Johnson Space Center for thermal and vacuum testing. The company embraces a "slow and steady" approach, inspired by Aesop's tortoise fable, reflecting its motto "Gradatim Ferociter."

Both companies receive billions of dollars from NASA to develop their landers under the Artemis program. SpaceX's Starship and Blue Origin's Blue Moon are central to upcoming U.S. astronaut moon missions. NASA views these projects as preparation for eventual Mars missions and is urging American companies to speed up lunar development to stay ahead of China.

SpaceX's recent astronaut mission to the International Space Station shows its operational strength, underscoring the high stakes in the growing private-sector space race.

QUICK READ

### GMR Airports profit drops 14 percent

**New Delhi**

GMR Airports Ltd reported a 14 percent fall in its net profit for the December 2025 quarter. The company posted a consolidated profit of Rs 173.96 crore, down from Rs 202.10 crore in the same period last year. The decline was mainly due to one-time expenses during the quarter. These expenses totaled Rs 183.12 crore. They included Rs 113.47 crore linked to ending a contract with Turkish firm Celebi and Rs 69.65 crore related to the impact of new labour laws. The company operates major airports in Delhi and Hyderabad.

### US Flags Chinese Firms Before Summit

**New Delhi**

The United States has added major Chinese companies, including Alibaba and BYD, to a Pentagon list over alleged military links. The decision comes weeks before President Donald Trump is expected to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing. The updated list, called 1260H, also includes Baidu and others. Officials say the firms may have ties to China's military. The companies strongly denied the claims and called them baseless. The move may raise tensions between Washington and Beijing ahead of the high level talks.

### Gold Slips Amid Volatility, Silver Shines

**Mumbai**

Gold prices fell 1.82 percent this week as global markets stayed volatile and the dollar showed strength. According to the India Bullion and Jewellers Association, 24-carat gold dropped to Rs 1,52,765 per 10 grams on Friday from Rs 1,55,593 on Monday. On the Multi Commodity Exchange of India, gold futures stood at Rs 1,56,200, while silver rose sharply to Rs 2,44,999 per kg. Softer US inflation data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics supported prices briefly. Analysts advise investors to hold 10 to 15 percent of portfolios in precious metals.

# Budget push makes India cloud AI powerhouse

**MUMBAI**

Initiatives include India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 and boosted electronics support, covering the entire tech chain from chip design to cloud and data infrastructure

The Union Budget 2026–27 has taken a major step to strengthen India's position as a global centre for cloud computing and artificial intelligence infrastructure. The government announced a tax holiday for eligible foreign cloud service providers using data centres located in India. Under the decision, their income will remain exempt from Indian tax from 2026–27 until 2046–47, subject to conditions.

Officials said the long tax window offers stability and confidence for companies making heavy investments in digital infrastructure. The move is expected to attract global players, keep high-value assets within the country, and deepen India's role in global digital supply chains. The policy also supports other technology-focused measures announced in the Budget.

These include the launch of India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 and increased support for electronics components manufacturing. Together, the steps aim to cover the full technology chain, from chip design and materials to cloud services and data infrastructure.

India's data centre sector is already seeing rapid growth. Nearly 70 billion dollars of investment is under way, with another 90 billion dollars announced. Current cloud data capacity stands at about 1,280 megawatts and is expected to grow four to five times by 2030.

With global demand rising for AI computing, the policy places India as a reliable destination for long-term infrastructure projects. According to UNCTAD, data centres formed a large share of global greenfield investments in 2025, crossing 270 billion dollars.

The Budget also proposed a common safe harbour margin for IT services exports, which already earn over 220 billion dollars. Overall, the measures signal India's intent to lead in digital infrastructure growth in coming years.

# Rural budget spending jumps sharply over past decade

**MUMBAI**

**Rural road connectivity nears universal, with PMGSY funding rising 51%; PMAY-G built 3.70 crore houses, funding increasing 266% over 11 years**

Rural development spending in India has risen sharply over the past decade, reflecting sustained fiscal focus on villages and small towns, according to an official statement released on Saturday. Budget allocations for rural development have increased by more than 211 per cent, reaching Rs 2.73 lakh crore in 2026–27.

The statement said this long-term investment has supported wide-ranging social and economic change. Extreme poverty declined to 5.3 per cent in 2022–23, below the global average. Multidimensional poverty also fell sharply, dropping to 11.28 per cent in 2023 from 55.3 per cent in 2005–06.

Rural road connectivity is now close to universal. Allocations under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana rose from Rs 12,581 crore in 2016–17 to Rs 19,000 crore in 2026–27, an increase of 51 per cent. By mid-January 2026, 99.6 per cent of eligible habitations were connected under the scheme.

Housing has been another major focus area. Around 3.70 crore rural houses were built over the past 11 years. Funding for PMAY-G increased by 266 per cent, from Rs 15,000 crore in 2016–17 to Rs 54,916.70 crore in 2026–27.

The government also highlighted a shift towards community-led development. Financial transfers to panchayats rose from Rs 2.36 lakh crore under the 15th Finance Commission to nearly Rs 4.35 lakh crore under the 16th Finance Commission, strengthening local decision-making.

Women-led self-help groups have played a key role, mobilising over 10 crore women nationwide. Access to basic services also improved. Drinking water, electricity and sanitation coverage rose from 22 per cent in 2016 to 64.3 per cent in 2025. Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, tap-water connections expanded rapidly, supporting healthier living conditions in rural India.

*The budget allocates Rs 2.56 lakh crore revenue and Rs 54,000 crore capital, with fiscal deficit at Rs 76,000 crore*

# Andhra Pradesh unveils welfare focused 2026 budget

**AMARAVATI**

The Andhra Pradesh government on Saturday presented a Rs 3.32 lakh crore Budget for 2026-27, aiming to balance welfare needs with long-term development goals. Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav said the plan reflects the state's effort to rebuild after years of economic stress and policy disruption.

The total outlay includes an estimated revenue expenditure of Rs 2.56 lakh crore and capital spending of nearly Rs 54,000 crore, focusing on public services and infrastructure creation. The government expects a revenue deficit of about Rs 22,000 crore, while the fiscal deficit is pegged at nearly Rs 76,000 crore, within manageable limits.

Major allocations highlight social inclusion and growth. The BC component received Rs 51,021 crore, underlining support for backward communities. School Education was allotted Rs 32,308 crore to strengthen learning outcomes and facilities. The Health, Medical and Family Welfare Department was given Rs 19,306 crore to improve hospitals and primary care services.

Rural development also saw strong backing. The Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Department, headed by Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, was allocated nearly Rs 23,000 crore to boost villages, roads, water supply, and employment programmes.

Speaking in the Assembly, Keshav said the Budget is more than numbers. He described it as a roadmap for the aspirations of five crore people. He noted that rebuilding Andhra Pradesh in just two years is difficult, citing the 2014 bifurcation and the policy setbacks between 2019 and 2024. The government, he said, is committed to steady recovery, transparent spending, and inclusive growth that restores confidence and lays a strong foundation for the future of the state and its people alike nation.

# Cabinet clears major NH-56 road upgrade

**NEW DELHI**

The Union Cabinet has approved a major road development project to improve connectivity in Gujarat by upgrading key stretches of National Highway-56. The project involves an investment of ₹4,583.64 crore and aims to widen two important sections of the highway into four lanes.

The decision was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The approved work includes the four-laning of the Dhamasiya–Bitada/Movi stretch, covering 47.46 km, and the Nasarpore–Malotha stretch, spanning 60.21 km. Together, the total project length comes to 107.67 km.

National Highway-56 starts at Nimbahera in Rajasthan and passes through Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh before ending near Vapi in Gujarat. The upgraded sections will pass through the Aspirational District of Narmada and improve access to tribal regions in Dahod, Chhota Udepur, Tapi and Bharuch districts. Officials said this will help boost local trade, travel and overall development.

The project will also strengthen connectivity to the Statue of Unity, one of the country's major tourist attractions, located close to NH-56. Improved roads are expected to support tourism and related businesses in the region.

Designed for a speed of 100 km per hour, the highway will reduce average travel time by nearly 40 per cent, cutting journeys from about two-and-a-half hours to one-and-a-half hours. The project is expected to generate over 42 lakh mandays of direct and indirect employment. Implemented by National Highways Authority of India, the upgrade will create smooth four-lane connectivity and ease congestion. It will also improve links to NH-53, NH-48 and the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, supporting faster and safer travel.

# AI push transforms Indian farming with digital scale

**NEW DELHI**

India has created a strong digital base for agriculture by using artificial intelligence and technology to support farmers across the country. Under the Digital Agriculture Mission, more than 7.63 crore farmer IDs have been created, while 23.5 crore crop plots have already been surveyed, an official statement said on Saturday.

The government said these efforts are helping farmers receive faster services, accurate advice, and better access to schemes. A key support system is the National Pest Surveillance System, which now covers 66 crops and over 432 types of pests. It sends real-time alerts to more than 10,000 agriculture extension workers, helping detect pest attacks early and reduce crop losses.

Technology is also improving communication with farmers. The Kisan e-Mitra chatbot has answered over 93 lakh farmer queries so far and handles more than 8,000 questions every day in 11 regional languages. This has made information easier to access, especially for small farmers in remote areas.

Artificial intelligence is also being used to support weather planning. An AI-based pilot project for predicting local monsoon onset during Kharif 2025 reached 3.88 crore farmers in 13 states through SMS. Surveys showed that 31 to 52 per cent of farmers changed sowing and land preparation decisions based on these forecasts.

Crop insurance has also become faster and more transparent. AI tools such as YES-TECH, CROPIC and the PMFBY WhatsApp chatbot are improving services under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

The Union Budget 2026–27 proposed Bharat-VISTAAR, a multilingual AI platform to link AgriStack and ICAR systems. AgriStack provides each farmer a secure digital identity linked to land, crops and benefits. The government said these steps show how AI is being used for inclusive growth and stronger farm livelihoods across India.

# AI Unlikely to Hurt India IT; May Create More Jobs: Report

**NEW DELHI**

Artificial intelligence is unlikely to destroy India's IT services industry and is more likely to create additional work opportunities, according to a new report by JP Morgan. The report, prepared by the firm's Asia Pacific Equity Research team, said fears about AI wiping out IT companies are overstated.

The note said AI should be seen as a productivity tool rather than a replacement for IT services firms. Instead of reducing demand, AI is expected to help companies deliver more work within the same budgets. Similar fears were raised in the past during major technology shifts such as offshore labour, enterprise software adoption and cloud computing. In each case, IT services did not disappear but adapted and expanded into new areas.

According to the report, AI will drive demand for several kinds of work. These include modernising old legacy systems, rewriting customised software applications, building AI agents for business operations, ensuring trust and reliability in AI systems, and integrating AI with physical and digital processes. All these tasks require strong technical support from IT services companies.

The report also highlighted that enterprise technology teams are often underfunded compared to the expectations placed on them. In this situation, AI is likely to be used to improve productivity and efficiency rather than to replace external service providers.

JP Morgan warned against the belief that AI can automatically create enterprise-level software without human involvement. Large organisations still need extensive integration, testing, customisation and ongoing support. The report described IT services firms as the "plumbers of the tech world," stressing their critical role in keeping complex systems running smoothly.

It noted that recent weakness in IT stocks reflects investor worries that rapid AI growth could slow revenue expansion. However, the report maintained that AI is more likely to reshape the industry than shrink it, opening new streams of work for Indian IT companies in the years ahead.

# Markets slide as AI worries hit stocks

**MUMBAI**

Indian stock markets ended the week on a weak note, losing around one per cent as investors remained cautious due to global pressures and growing worries linked to artificial intelligence. Equity benchmarks slipped steadily, with heavy selling seen in technology stocks, which followed losses on Wall Street.

The Nifty declined 0.87 per cent during the week and closed sharply lower on the final trading day. The Sensex also fell over one per cent for the week, reflecting broad-based selling across sectors. Market experts said weak global cues and uncertainty over future earnings weighed on investor confidence.

All major sectoral indices ended in the red. Metal stocks were the worst hit, falling over three per cent, while real estate and FMCG shares also posted notable losses. The IT index touched its lowest level in ten months before recovering slightly by the close. Analysts said concerns remain that fast progress in AI could disrupt traditional IT service models and affect long-term revenues.

Global factors added to the pressure. A stronger US dollar, supported by better-than-expected American jobs data, reduced hopes of early interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve. Reports suggesting possible changes in global dollar settlement systems also added to market nervousness.

Market analysts warned that if key technical levels break, further downside cannot be ruled out, though some support may emerge at lower levels. Midcap stocks showed limited weakness, while small-cap shares managed modest gains, indicating selective buying.

Looking ahead, investors are expected to closely track global economic signals, geopolitical developments and discussions around artificial intelligence, including insights from the upcoming India AI Impact Summit, for fresh direction in the markets.

NEXT PHASE STARTUPS

# *Government clears major fund boost for startups*

**NEW DELHI**

In a major step to strengthen India's growing startup ecosystem, the Union Cabinet approved the launch of Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 with a total outlay of ₹10,000 crore. The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The new fund aims to bring more long-term domestic capital into the startup sector and provide stronger financial support to young and innovative companies across the country. Officials said the scheme is designed to support the next phase of India's startup journey by building a stronger venture capital ecosystem and encouraging innovation-led entrepreneurship.

Fund of Funds 2.0 builds on the success of the earlier Fund of Funds for Startups launched in 2016 under the Startup India programme. Since then, India's startup landscape has expanded rapidly. The number of recognised startups has grown from fewer than 500 to over two lakh, according to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. The year 2025 recorded the highest number of startup registrations so far.

Under the first phase, the entire ₹10,000 crore corpus was committed to 145 Alternative Investment Funds. These funds invested more than ₹25,500 crore in over 1,370 startups across sectors such as agriculture, artificial intelligence, healthcare, fintech, education, manufacturing, clean technology and space technology.

The new fund will follow a more focused funding approach. It will prioritise deep-tech projects, technology-driven manufacturing and early-growth stage startups that need patient capital. The government said special attention will be given to supporting startups outside major cities so that innovation reaches smaller towns and regions.

Officials added that the initiative will help fill high-risk funding gaps, promote self-reliance and strengthen India's domestic venture capital base, especially smaller funds, creating a more balanced and inclusive startup ecosystem.

# THE GREAT NIGHT OF AWAKENING — The Spiritual Power of Maha Shivaratri

**PRADIVYA NAMBIAR**

Once a year, on the darkest night of the lunar month, millions across India and the world remain awake — not in celebration alone, but in vigil. This night is Maha Shivaratri, the "Great Night of Shiva." Yet beyond ritual, beyond mythology, beyond temple bells and sacred chants, lies something far more profound: a night dedicated to awakening.

In the yogic understanding of life, Shiva is not merely a deity seated in the Himalayas. Shiva represents pure consciousness — the boundless awareness that exists before thought, before identity, before creation itself. If life is movement, Shiva is stillness. If life is sound, Shiva is silence. If life is form, Shiva is the formless. Maha Shivaratri is therefore not simply a festival. It is an invitation.

## The Symbolism of the Darkest Night

The festival falls on the fourteenth night of the waning moon, when the sky is at its darkest. In spiritual symbolism, darkness is not negativity — it is the unknown.

It is the space where the ego dissolves, where illusions lose their grip, where the noise of the external world quiets.

In that darkness, one can encounter truth. Human life often moves outward — toward ambition, possession, recognition, identity. Yet every wisdom tradition reminds us that fulfillment is not found by accumulation but by dissolution. Maha Shivaratri embodies this understanding. It is the night when seekers consciously turn inward.

## The Science of Stillness

Yogic sciences describe this night as one of unique energetic alignment. The Earth's positioning is said to support an upward movement of energy in the human system. For this reason, devotees remain awake, keeping the spine erect through meditation, prayer, and chanting. It is not an act of endurance; it is an act of receptivity.

To sit upright and alert on this night is symbolic and scientific — a posture that allows awareness to rise beyond instinct, beyond compulsion, beyond habitual patterns. This is why fasting is observed. This is why silence is practiced. This is why the sacred mantra "Om Namah Shivaya" reverberates through temples and homes alike. These are not mere customs; they are tools to refine perception.

## Destruction as Liberation

Shiva is often called the destroyer. To the uninitiated, destruction sounds ominous. But in the spiritual context, what is destroyed is ignorance — false identity, accumulated conditioning, and the heavy weight of unexamined living. Every transformation requires dissolution. The seed must break to become a tree. The night must deepen before dawn appears. In honoring Shiva, devotees are honoring the courage to let go.

Maha Shivaratri asks a simple yet radical question: Who are you without your roles, your titles, your history? In that inquiry begins awakening.

## Beyond Religion

Though rooted in Hindu tradition, the essence of this night transcends religious boundaries. It speaks to a universal human longing — the longing to experience life not as fragmentation, but as unity.

To awaken is to realize that consciousness is not confined to the body or personality. It is vast, interconnected, and deeply alive. In that realization, fear softens. Attachment loosens. Compassion deepens.

This is the power of Maha Shivaratri: it shifts the axis of life from external acquisition to internal realization.

## The Great Night of Awakening

Across the country, lamps are lit. Bells ring. Sacred ash is applied. Devotees offer water, milk, and bilva leaves upon the Shiva Lingam — a symbol of the infinite, formless source of creation.

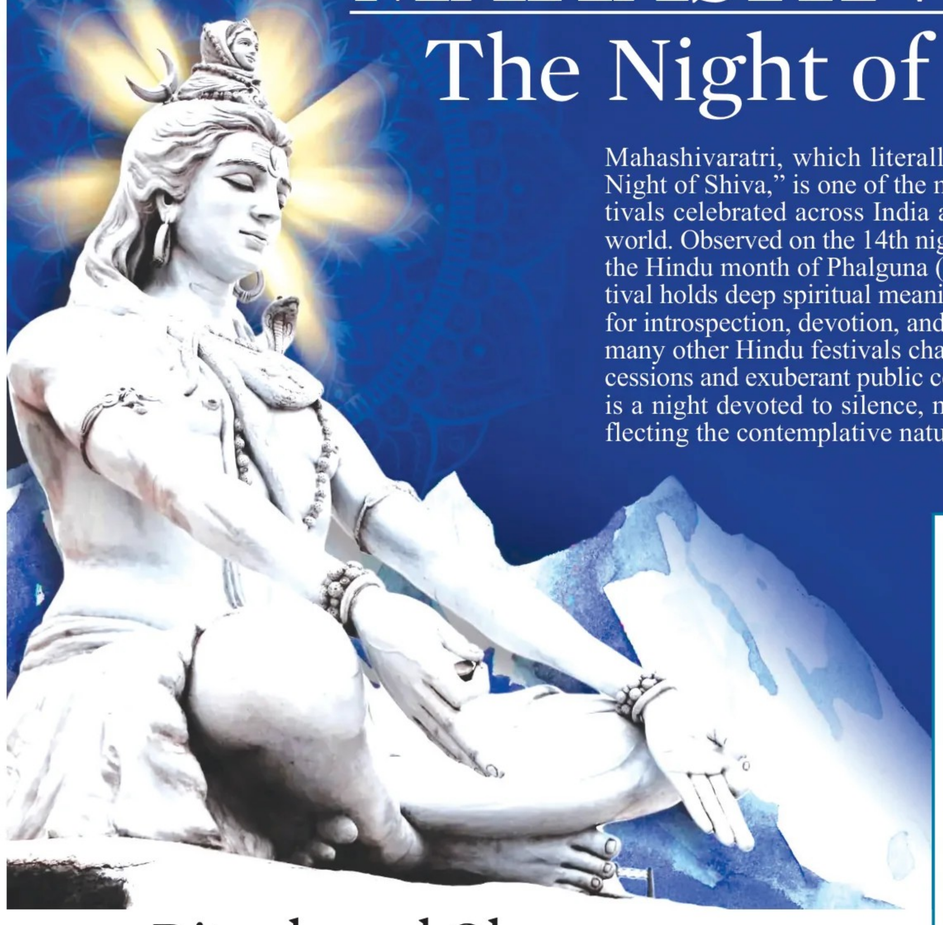
But the truest offering is awareness. To remain awake on Maha Shivaratri is to symbolically refuse unconscious living. It is to choose presence over distraction, stillness over restlessness, depth over surface.

In a world that rarely pauses, this night insists on silence. In a culture that celebrates accumulation, this night honors emptiness.

And in that emptiness, something extraordinary becomes possible — the direct experience of life as sacred. Maha Shivaratri is not merely observed. It is entered. It is the great night when the seeker and the sought dissolve into one — when stillness reveals itself as the very foundation of existence.

It is, truly, the Great Night of Awakening.

# MAHASHIVARATRI: The Night of Lord Shiva



Mahashivaratri, which literally translates to "the Great Night of Shiva," is one of the most significant Hindu festivals celebrated across India and in various parts of the world. Observed on the 14th night of the new moon during the Hindu month of Phalguna (February-March), this festival holds deep spiritual meaning and is revered as a time for introspection, devotion, and divine connection. Unlike many other Hindu festivals characterized by colorful processions and exuberant public celebrations, Mahashivaratri is a night devoted to silence, meditation, and fasting, reflecting the contemplative nature of Lord Shiva himself.

## Rituals and Observances

Mahashivaratri rituals vary slightly across regions, but certain practices remain universally observed. Central to the festival is the worship of the Shiva Lingam, a symbol of Lord Shiva's infinite nature. Devotees visit temples or set up home altars to perform Abhishekam, the ritual bathing of the lingam with water, milk, honey, curd, and other sacred substances. Each item used in the ritual carries symbolic meaning – milk for purity, honey for unity, and water for spiritual cleansing.

Fasting, or vrat, is a key aspect of Mahashivaratri observance. Some devotees observe a strict fast, abstaining from food and water for 24 hours, while others follow a partial fast, consuming only fruits and milk. Night-long vigils or jagarans are also common, where devotees sing bhajans, recite Shiva mantras, and meditate, staying awake throughout the night as a mark of devotion.

In many parts of India, particularly in Varanasi, Haridwar, and Rishikesh, grand temple processions are held, attracting thousands of pilgrims. Special poojas, including Rudrabhishek, which involves chanting the Rudram hymns, are performed to invoke Lord Shiva's blessings for prosperity, health, and spiritual well-being.

## Regional Celebrations

The celebration of Mahashivaratri varies across India, reflecting the country's rich cultural diversity. In Tamil Nadu, the festival is celebrated with grand temple rituals and early morning processions of the Shiva Lingam adorned with flowers. Devotees in this region also engage in traditional dances and music as offerings to Lord Shiva. In Maharashtra, the festival has a distinctive flavor, with devotees performing night-long vigils at temples while singing abhangas (devotional songs) dedicated to Lord Shiva. Some communities also organize yatra (pilgrimages) to nearby Shiva shrines, emphasizing collective devotion and community bonding.

In the northern states like Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, the festival is marked by large gatherings at famous temples such as Kashi Vishwanath in Varanasi and Neelkanth Mahadev in Rishikesh. Pilgrims undertake long journeys to these temples, demonstrating their faith and seeking the blessings of the "Lord of Lords."

The festival is also celebrated internationally wherever Hindu communities reside. In countries such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and parts of Southeast Asia, Mahashivaratri is observed with temple rituals, fasting, and cultural programs, reflecting the global reverence for Lord Shiva.

## Spiritual Significance

The spiritual essence of Mahashivaratri is deeply connected to introspection, meditation, and the pursuit of inner wisdom. According to Hindu philosophy, the night of Mahashivaratri is considered an opportune moment for spiritual growth because cosmic energies are believed to be aligned, making it easier for devotees to achieve moksha (liberation) or to cleanse themselves of past sins.

Fasting on this day, abstaining from sleep, and engaging in continuous worship of Lord Shiva are practices believed to strengthen one's mind and soul. Devotees chant Om Namah Shivaya, meditate in front of Shiva lingams (symbolic representations of the deity), and perform rituals that emphasize detachment from worldly desires. Scholars of Hinduism suggest that the festival serves as a reminder of the importance of self-discipline, introspection, and spiritual resilience in one's journey toward self-realization.

## Cultural and Social Impact

Mahashivaratri is not only a religious occasion but also a cultural phenomenon that influences music, art, and literature. Devotional music, including bhajans, kirtans, and classical compositions, is composed specifically for this festival, celebrating the attributes of Lord Shiva. Traditional art forms, such as Tanjore paintings, Madhubani art, and temple carvings, often depict the divine dance of Shiva or his union with Parvati, keeping the stories and philosophies alive for future generations.

Socially, Mahashivaratri fosters community bonding and collective participation. In many villages and towns, local committees organize night-long satsangs (spiritual gatherings), cultural performances, and charitable initiatives such as feeding the poor. These acts of service align with the moral teachings associated with Lord Shiva – compassion, generosity, and humility.

## Conclusion

Mahashivaratri, with its profound spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions, remains one of the most revered festivals in Hindu tradition. It is a night that transcends mere ritual, inviting devotees to contemplate the deeper truths of existence, honor the balance of cosmic forces, and embrace the virtues of self-discipline, compassion, and spiritual devotion.

Whether through fasting, meditation, temple rituals, or community gatherings, the essence of Mahashivaratri lies in its call to awaken the soul and connect with the infinite. In a world often dominated by noise and haste, this festival reminds humanity of the importance of introspection, devotion, and living in harmony with the cosmic rhythm that Lord Shiva so beautifully embodies.

In essence, Mahashivaratri is more than a celebration; it is a timeless invitation to explore the spiritual depths within ourselves, to seek wisdom and enlightenment, and to honor the eternal dance of creation, preservation, and transformation. As millions of devotees across the globe observe this sacred night, the festival continues to illuminate the path of dharma, reminding all that the journey toward self-realization is both a personal and a cosmic endeavor.

# Hanuman's Name Reverberates in Mysuru: Over 50,000 Devotees Recite Hanuman Chalisa

**MYSURU**

A grand mass recitation event titled "Sri Hanuman Chalisa Parayana Mahayajna" was conducted with deep devotion and spiritual fervor on Saturday at the Maharaja College Grounds in the city, organized by Avadhoota Datta Peetham.

In the divine presence of Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji, the collective chanting of Hanuman's name by more than 50,000 devotees gathered at the venue echoed in all directions.

Before the stage program began, Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji offered Poornahuti to the Pavamana Homa along with Sri Datta Vijayananda Teertha Swamiji. He later arrived at the main stage.

On the occasion, MLAs Srivatsa, K. Harish Gowda, G.T. Devegowda, and several prominent citizens of the city welcomed Swamiji with reverence and devotion.

Amid chants of "Ram Lakshman Janaki, Jai Bolo Hanuman Ki," Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji formally inaugurated the program.

The recitation, interwoven with narration from the Sundarakanda, continued uninterrupted for nearly two hours.

During this period, the Hanuman Chalisa was recited a total of 18 times.

### A Sea of Saffron

Devotees participating in the event were seen holding saffron flags in their hands.

The entire ground was adorned with saffron-colored flags, creating the impression of a vast ocean of Hanuman devotees flowing into the venue.

Devotees from across the country and abroad uniquely expressed their devotion by holding sacred flags and dancing in praise of Lord Hanuman.

More than 50,000 people took part in this grand Parayana Mahayajna.

Addressing the massive gathering, Sri Datta Vijayananda Teertha Swamiji delivered his blessings.

The Mahayajna concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.

# Kumble, Dravid thank Assn for naming bowling ends

## Karnataka legends honoured as stadium bowling ends renamed

**BENGALURU**

The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) paid tribute to some of the state's finest cricketers by naming the bowling ends and select stands at the iconic M Chinnaswamy Stadium after them.

The Pavilion End and Northern End have now been rechristened in honour of former India captains Anil Kumble and Rahul Dravid, recognising their immense contributions to Karnataka and Indian cricket. The association also named the B Lower Stand after Shantha Rangaswamy, while the M3 and M4 stands were dedicated to late C Nagaraj and late Dr (Capt) K Thimmappaiah respectively. The move comes in addition to existing stand names instituted by a previous managing committee.

Speaking at the ceremony, Kumble described KSCA as his cricketing home, having risen through the ranks from age-group cricket to the Ranji Trophy. "It's truly special that all the contributions have been recognised and are now permanently etched in the stadium," he said, adding that Karnataka cricket shaped him as much as he contributed to it.

Kumble, India's highest Test wicket-taker, said returning to the Karnataka dressing room always felt like coming back home. "No matter how much one might have played for India, coming back to play for Karnataka meant the world to me," he noted.

Dravid echoed the sentiment, calling KSCA his "second home." "We've probably spent more time here than in our houses," he remarked, expressing gratitude to the association and its president Venkatesh Prasad for the honour.

Both legends said the recognition would remain a cherished milestone for their families and future generations of Karnataka cricketers.

## Snehit Suravajjula, Nithya Mani upset higher-ranked opponents at WTT

**CHENNAI**

India enjoyed a memorable outing at the WTT Star Contender, headlined by a dramatic comeback win from Snehit Suravajjula and a giant-killing performance by Nithya Mani.

Snehit produced one of the matches of the tournament, saving six match points in the decider to upset Japan's 13th seed Mizuki Oikawa. The Indian rallied from two games down to clinch a thrilling 3-2 (9-11, 15-17, 11-4, 11-6, 18-16) victory in 52 minutes. He now faces top seed Oh Junsung in the Round of 16.

"I was just telling myself to focus on one point at a time and not think of the score," Snehit said, reflecting on the tense closing stages. The 25-year-old admitted that despite losing the first two close games, he gained belief that he could match his opponent's level. In the women's draw, world No. 481 Nithya Mani stunned 14th seed Minhyung Jee 3-2 (10-12, 12-10, 8-11, 11-7, 11-7) to enter the pre-quarterfinals. She next takes on fourth seed Cheng I-Ching, who defeated India's Ayhika Mukherjee.

## Bengaluru FC sets the tone for the new Indian Super League season

**BENGALURU**

Bengaluru FC addressed the media at its Season Opener Press Conference held on Saturday at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium, outlining its roadmap for the upcoming ISL campaign.

Head Coach Renedy Singh and forward Ryan Williams spoke about the team's pre-season preparations, squad mindset and expectations ahead of the opening fixture against Sporting Club Delhi on February 15.

The club emphasised consistency, defensive organisation and a proactive attacking approach as key pillars for the 13-match league phase. Preparations over recent weeks have focused on fitness, tactical balance and strengthening on-field chemistry.

"The players have worked very hard over the past few weeks and are fully prepared for the challenge ahead," said Renedy Singh. "It's a 13-match season, but our focus is on taking it one game at a time. We want to attack with intent but also defend as a unit. The whole team will contribute in both phases."

Ryan Williams echoed the optimism within the camp. "There's a real sense of excitement in the group. We've been waiting to get back out there, especially in front of our fans at home. When you're confident off the pitch, it reflects in performances. Everyone is motivated from the first match," he said.

The club also underlined the importance of home support and identified marquee fixtures against Mohun Bagan Super Giant and Mumbai City FC as key dates in the calendar.

## India top medal standings at Asian Shooting Championship

**NEW DELHI**

India finished on top of the medal standings at the Asian Shooting Championship, capping off a commanding campaign with a rich haul on the concluding day of competition.

The hosts added six gold, three silver and four bronze medals, underlining their supremacy across pistol and rifle events. Indian shooters swept the podium in the 25m centre fire pistol and 25m pistol junior categories, while also securing three medals in the 50m rifle prone events across senior and junior divisions. Four additional gold medals in team competitions further cemented India's dominance.

In the 25m centre fire pistol, Amanpreet Singh clinched gold with an aggregate score of 589-24x across precision and rapid stages. Olympian Gurpreet Singh secured silver with 584-20x, while Ankur Goel took bronze with 570-11x. The trio combined seamlessly to claim team gold as well.

Suraj Sharma continued his impressive run in the 25m pistol junior event, winning gold with 585-25x. Mukesh Nelavalli added a silver to his tally with 582-21x, and Deaflympics medallist Abhinav Deshwal bagged bronze with 573-17x. Together, they too secured team gold.

In the 50m rifle prone senior event, Olympian Sift Kaur Samra earned silver with 623.2, while 2010 World Champion Tejaswani Sawant marked her return to the podium with bronze. Kazakhstan's Yelizaveta Bezrukova won gold. Samra and Sawant, along with Manini Kaushik, clinched team gold.

Among juniors, Dhavalika Devi Nyamurus secured bronze, as Prachi Gaikwad, Anuskha Thokur and Nyamurus combined for another team gold, ensuring India ended the championship on a resounding high.

## FIH Pro League: Belgium men's national field hockey team continues winning run

**ROURKELA**

Belgium consolidated its position at the top of the FIH Pro League standings with an emphatic 5-2 win over Argentina men's national field hockey team, registering its third consecutive victory.

The World No. 2 side, unbeaten in regulation time this season, began cautiously as both teams sized each other up in a fast-paced contest marked by contrasting styles. Argentina, buoyed by its recent win over India, started aggressively and went ahead in the 19th minute through Tomas Domene, who continued his fine scoring form.

Argentina earned a flurry of penalty corners in search of a second goal but failed to capitalise, with Belgium's defence holding firm. The Red Lions patiently controlled possession, waiting for the right openings.

The second half saw a transformed Belgian side. Stretching play to the flanks before cutting into the circle, Belgium shifted momentum decisively. Arthur de Sloover and Tobias Biekens struck in quick succession to overturn the deficit. Veteran Matias Rey equalised just before the final break, setting up an intense last quarter. Belgium, however, raised its tempo in the closing stages. Targeting cramped spaces inside the Argentine circle, Alexander Hendrickx converted two penalty corners with precision before Roman Duvekot added the fifth to seal a comprehensive victory. With momentum firmly on its side, Belgium looks increasingly dominant as the Pro League season gathers pace.

## ICC T20 WC 2026: 'We will see about it on Sunday': Salman Ali Agha on handshake with India

**COLOMBO**

Pakistan captain Salman Ali Agha remained non-committal on whether his team would shake hands with India ahead of their high-voltage T20 World Cup encounter on Sunday, saying the matter would be decided closer to match time.

**Tension surrounds India-Pakistan clash over handshake protocol issue**

"We will see about it on Sunday," Agha said when asked if the customary handshake would take place at the toss or after the game. Despite the uncertainty, he stressed that both sides must uphold the spirit of cricket during the marquee clash.

The much-anticipated fixture has drawn added attention following India's earlier decision not to engage in the traditional pre- and post-match handshakes. Indian skipper Suryakumar Yadav had announced during the Asia Cup in Dubai last September that his team would refrain from the gesture as a mark of respect for victims of the Pahalgam terror attack in April last year. The move was also described as a sign of solidarity with the Indian Army during 'Operation Sindoor'.

It is understood that the same protocol is likely to be followed in Sunday's contest, with neither captain expected to initiate a handshake at the toss or at the conclusion of the match.

Amid lingering tension after Pakistan's initial boycott of the fixture, Agha sought to steer clear of controversy and reiterated his focus on cricket.

"I expect the game should be played in the spirit it has always been played since its inception," he said, underlining that sportsmanship must prevail despite the off-field narrative surrounding the blockbuster encounter.

*Cricket's fiercest rivalry often spills into dramatic on-field confrontations*

## From Prasad–Sohail to Abhishek–Rauf: India-Pakistan rivalry's fiery moments

**COLOMBO**

With India and Pakistan set to renew hostilities in the T20 World Cup, memories of past flashpoints between players from the two nations have resurfaced. Over the decades, their contests have not only produced thrilling cricket but also heated exchanges that added spice to the rivalry.

One of the earliest dramatic moments came during the 1992 World Cup when Javed Miandad mocked Indian wicketkeeper Kiran More by jumping in imitation of his excessive appealing. The incident remains one of the most replayed clips in World Cup history.

Perhaps the most iconic altercation unfolded in the 1996 World Cup quarterfinal. After smashing a boundary, Aamer Sohail gestured towards the off-side boundary, seemingly warning Prasad. The Indian pacer responded the very next ball by uprooting Sohail's off stump, followed by a fiery send-off that shifted the momentum decisively.

In 2007, Gautam Gambhir and Shahid Afridi were involved in a heated clash during an ODI, even colliding mid-pitch before umpires stepped in. Gambhir again found himself at the centre of drama in the 2010 Asia Cup, exchanging words with wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal.

That same tournament witnessed a tense face-off between Harbhajan Singh and Shoaib Akhtar after a flurry of sixes and bouncers in a last-over thriller.

More recently, the 2025 Asia Cup saw Abhishek Sharma and Haris Rauf exchange sharp words after a boundary, underlining that the intensity of this rivalry remains undiminished.

As the two sides prepare to clash again, history suggests emotions could once more run high on cricket's grandest stage.

## BWF Council proposes 3x15 scoring system

**KUALA LUMPUR**

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) Council has proposed adopting a 3x15 scoring system as the sport's official format and will place the motion for approval at its Annual General Meeting on April 25 in Horsens, Denmark.

The Council, during its meeting on November 8 last year, concluded that the 3x15 format — with setting to 21 — strikes a balance between match excitement, competitive fairness, player welfare and overall tournament presentation.

The system has already been trialed in selected national and Grade 3 tournaments and was implemented at the BWF World Junior Championships in Guwahati last year. According to BWF research, the revised format shortens match duration and increases the frequency of close-score scenarios, pushing players into decisive endgame situations earlier and maintaining audience engagement.

## Pedro Neto hat trick powers Chelsea F.C. into FA Cup fifth round, joined by Wrexham A.F.C.

**HULL**

Pedro Neto struck a sensational hat trick, including a goal scored directly from a corner, as Chelsea thrashed Hull City 4-0 to storm into the fifth round of the FA Cup.

The Premier League side maintained its perfect record against Hull in the competition, having now advanced in all nine of their FA Cup meetings. Chelsea seized control early, and Neto's powerful drive from outside the box gave the visitors a deserved halftime lead.

Six minutes after the restart, Neto produced a moment of audacity, curling a low corner that slipped through a crowded penalty area and straight into the net. Young Brazilian Estêvão added a third soon after, side-footing home from close range, before Neto completed his treble with a composed finish to cap a dominant display.

"Pedro Neto is an incredible player," teammate Liam Delap, who provided three assists, told. "He is playing in a position he is not even used to but he showed his quality."

Elsewhere, Wrexham reached the fifth round for the first time in 29 years after edging Ipswich Town 1-0 in an all-Championship clash. A first-half strike from Josh Windass proved decisive as Ipswich failed to register a shot on target.

Both sides are chasing promotion to the Premier League, with Ipswich placed third and Wrexham sixth in the standings. The Welsh club is pursuing a remarkable fourth consecutive promotion that would lift it into the top flight for the first time in its 158-year history.

# RICHARD ANTHONY
## SPIN-OFF MOVES AHEAD AFTER LONG WAIT

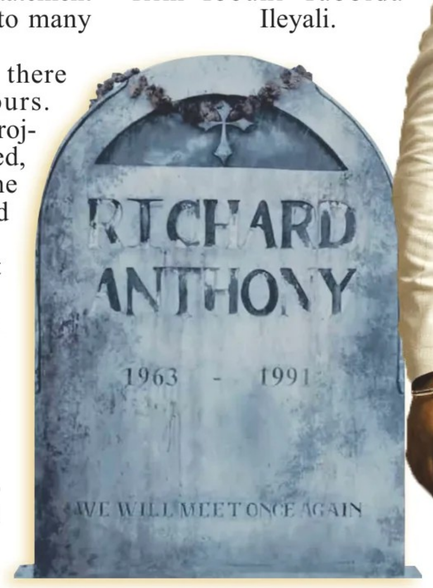
Fans of Rakshit Shetty have reason to celebrate as Richard Anthony is finally moving forward. The film is a spin-off of the 2014 hit Ulidavaru Kandanthe. Actor Pramod Shetty recently confirmed that the script is ready and the team will begin pre-production in the next two to three months. Shooting is expected to start in early 2025.

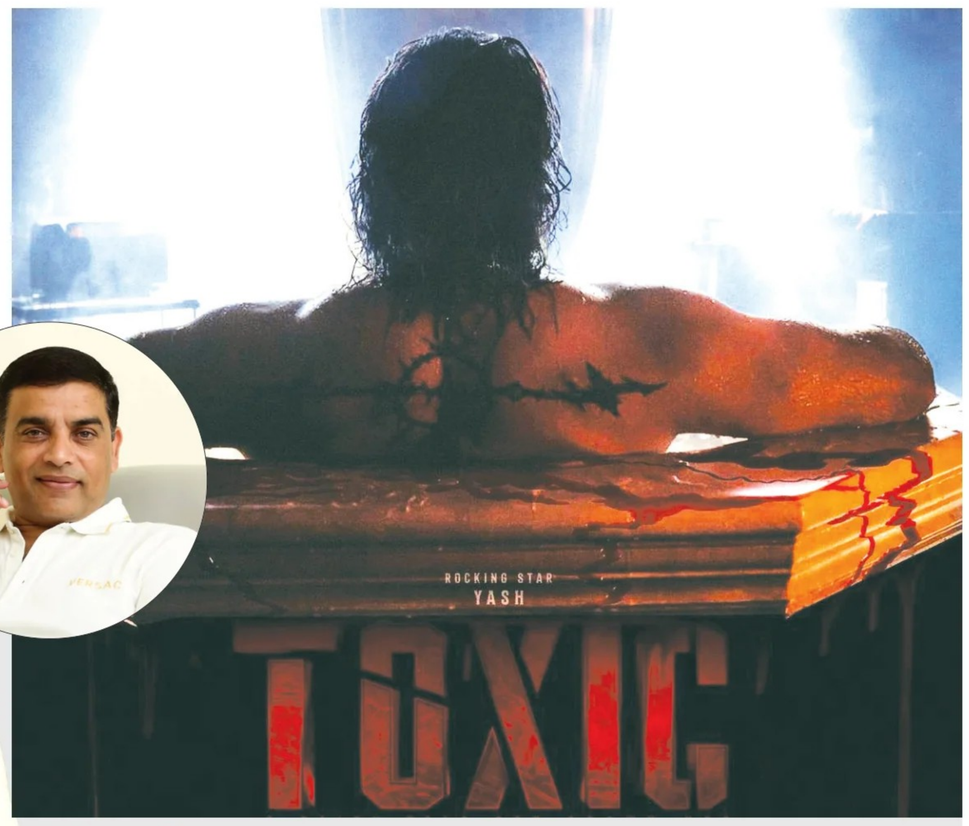
Rakshit Shetty was last seen on screen in 2023 in Sapta Sagaradaache Ello – Side B. He last directed a film in 2014 with Ulidavaru Kandanthe. In 2021, he had shared plans to return to direction with Richard Anthony. Since then, fans had been waiting for a clear update.

Pramod Shetty, who played Dinesha in the original film, shared the news at an event for his upcoming movie Shesha. His statement has brought relief to many fans.

Over the years, there were many rumours. Some claimed the project had been stopped, while others said the production house had stepped away.

Earlier, Rakshit had said the film would take about one and a half years to complete. If all goes as planned, it may release in late 2027 or early 2028. The story is said to be both a prequel and a sequel. Most of the shooting will take place around Udupi and nearby areas. Rakshit also backed the 2024 film Ibbani Tabbida Ileyali.






## Dil Raju Denies Publicity Rumours Over Toxic Deal

The upcoming action thriller Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups, starring Yash, is creating strong buzz ahead of its release on March 19, 2026. The film recently made headlines after reports claimed that a massive Rs 120 crore deal was signed for its distribution in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Producer Dil Raju addressed rumours that the deal was just a publicity stunt. Speaking during promotions for his new film Markandeya, he dismissed the claims with humor. He said no one would risk investing such a huge amount only for publicity. He also joked that once the payment is made, he is ready to share his bank statement to prove the deal is real.

Earlier this month, Dil Raju's production banner announced on social media that they would distribute the film across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The announcement increased excitement among fans who are eagerly waiting to see Yash back on the big screen. Yash was last seen in the blockbuster KGF: Chapter 2 in 2022. Since then, fans have been waiting for his next big project.

## Lokesh Kanakaraj
### Turns Actor In Film DC

Director Lokesh Kanagaraj is set to make his acting debut in the upcoming film DC. The movie is directed by Arun Matheswaran and produced by Sun Pictures.

On Valentine's Day, the makers released a special promo revealing character details. Lokesh plays a man named Devadas. Actress Wamiqa Gabbi plays Chandra, while Sanjana A K plays Parvathi. The promo created excitement among fans and hinted that the film could be a gangster drama.

The video shows Parvathi standing before a microphone but unable to speak or sing. Chandra is seen getting ready in what appears to be a brothel. There are emotional moments between Devadas and the two women. However, the promo also includes violent scenes, with Devadas shown attacking men and escaping in a car with Chandra.

The film has already generated huge interest because it marks Lokesh's first appearance as a lead actor. Dialogues are written by Arun Matheswaran and Franklin Jacob, with additional screenplay by Arun Ranjan.

Music is composed by Anirudh Ravichander, cinematography is handled by Mukesh G, editing by G K Prasanna, and art direction by Kannan S.

Sources say the shoot is progressing quickly and the film is expected to release this year. For this role, Lokesh reportedly trained in martial arts in Thailand after directing Coolie starring Rajinikanth.

## Makers Confirm Nani's The Paradise Is Standalone

Rumours about a sequel to Nani's upcoming film have now been cleared. The makers of The Paradise have confirmed that the movie will be a standalone project and not a two-part series.

Since its announcement, the action thriller starring Nani has created strong buzz. Many reports claimed that the film would be made in two parts.

However, the team has officially denied these claims. According to reports, when a fan asked about a second part, the makers clearly stated that there are no plans for a sequel.

Directed by Srikanth Odela, The Paradise was earlier scheduled to release on March 26. The release date has now been pushed to August 21, 2026. The team shared a new poster and explained that they do not want to rush the film. They said they need more time to deliver a quality product that meets audience expectations.

The film tells the story of a marginalised tribal community that has long been denied basic rights. It focuses on their fight for justice when a new leader rises to challenge the system and end oppression.

Along with Nani, the film stars Kayadu Lohar as the female lead. Mohan Babu, Raghav Juyal, and Sampoornesh Babu will appear in key roles.

Music for the film is composed by Anirudh Ravichander, with choreography by Sudhan Master. The team is currently shooting major scenes, including Nani's grand introduction song.

## Sandeepa Dhar Shares Life Lesson From Film Role

Actress Sandeepa Dhar says her upcoming film Do Deewane Seher Mein has changed the way she looks at life. The actress recently shared that her role in the film taught her that comparison can steal happiness. Taking to Instagram, Sandeepa posted pictures from the film with co-star Mrunal Thakur. She also wrote a long note about how her character made her reflect on sibling comparisons. She spoke about a common line many people hear while growing up — being compared to a brother, sister, or even a friend. In the film, Sandeepa plays Naina, while Mrunal plays Roshni. She explained that both sisters face constant comparison. Roshni is made to feel that she is not good enough, while Naina feels pressure to always be perfect. According to Sandeepa, this kind of comparison turns siblings into rivals and makes love feel conditional. She said a simple comment like be like your sister can stay in a person's mind for years.

## First Look Poster Of Signal At 11.30 Unveiled

The makers of Signal at 11.30, starring Santhosh Prathap and Bhavya Trikha, have released the first look poster of the upcoming thriller. The film is directed and produced by Malarvizhi Natesan along with Dr. Shivani Subramani. The first look poster was unveiled at a well-known college in Chennai. The event was attended by many students and created much excitement. The poster shows strong emotions and a mysterious design, hinting at an intense story.

Speaking about the title, Malarvizhi Natesan said it is too early to share full details. She explained that the story focuses on a life-changing incident that happens at 11.30 p.m. at a traffic signal. That single moment changes the hero's life completely.

The director said the idea of the film immediately caught their attention. As the script developed, they wanted an actor who looked heroic but could also show deep emotions. She said Santhosh Prathap perfectly suited the role and delivered one of his best performances.

The film also features actors Poojitha Ponnada, Jayaprakash, and Munishkanth in key roles.

The technical team includes music composer D. Imman, cinematographer Raja Bhattacharjee, editor R. Kalaivanan, and choreographer Sherif.

## Anand Ramanand Sagar Chopra Dies At 84

Anand Ramanand Sagar Chopra, son of legendary filmmaker Ramanand Sagar, passed away in Mumbai on February 13, 2026. He was 84 years old. The Sagar family said he died peacefully and described him as a man of warmth, dignity, and strong values.

Anand was part of the second generation that managed Sagar Arts. He carried forward the creative legacy of his father, who created the iconic 1987 television series Ramayan. His last rites were held at the Hindu Smashan Bhumi (Pavan Hans) in Mumbai. Filmmaker Ramesh Sippy and actress Bhagyashree were among those who attended the funeral.

Anand was one of five children of Ramanand and Leelavati Sagar. He directed and produced several projects, including the 2008 remake of Ramayan. He was also linked with popular television shows like Alif Laila. He contributed to the film Armaan, known for the song Ramba Ho Ho Ho, which was recently recreated for Durandhar starring Ranveer Singh.

The original Ramayan series featured actors Arun Govil, Dipika Chikhlia, Sunil Lahri, Arvind Trivedi, and Dara Singh.

He is survived by his wife Nisha Sagar, his children, and grandchildren. Last year, his brother Prem Sagar also passed away.

## Romantic Poster Of Ek Din Released On Valentine's Day

The makers of Ek Din, starring Junaid Khan and Sai Pallavi, have released a new poster on Valentine's Day. The fresh look has created excitement among fans and movie lovers. In the poster, Sai Pallavi is seen holding a muffin as if she is wishing Junaid's character. The two share a sweet and warm gaze.

The background shows a romantic winter setting, with the couple walking side-by-side on a snow-covered street. Both are dressed in cosy winter clothes and appear lost in their own world. The soft smiles and simple moment capture the feeling of young love.

Ek Din marks Junaid Khan's third major project as a lead actor. It is also special for Sai Pallavi, as the film will mark her Bollywood debut. The film is directed by Sunil Pandey and written by Sneha Desai and Spandan Mishra.

The film is produced by Mansoor Khan, Aamir Khan, and Aparna Purohit under the banner of Aamir Khan Productions.

Music for the film is composed by Ram Sampath, with lyrics written by Irshad Kamil.

The romantic drama is all set to hit theatres on May 1, 2026, promising a heartfelt love story for audiences.

City Hilights (English Daily) published by P. Sunil Kumar (Publisher) on behalf of Immaculate Broadcasting Consortium World News (P) Ltd., No. 18, JRV Court, Queens's Road, Bengaluru – 560001 and printed at Manipal Media Network Limited Opp. Govt School, Kempalinganahalli, Near Kunigal Cross, Nelamangala TQ, Bangalore Rural Dist. -562123, Printed at No-7/2 plot no.CA-3/1,28(p)&29(p) Kapanoor 2nd Stage Industrial Area Kapnoor Village Kalaburagi -585104. Printed at S. J. R. V. Printers, No. 208 Plot No. B-019 KSSIDC Industrial Area, Irfan Ahamed Khan Pathan, 4th Main Road Gamanagatti, Hubballi-Dharwad – 580025. and Elegant Offset Printers Pvt. Ltd. No. 5-61/1, Shed No. M-6, Yeyyadi Industrial Estate, Yeyyadi, Mangalore - 575 008. (RNI No: KARENG / 2015 / 63243), Regd. No. BGGPO-2581/2017-2019 Posted at Bengaluru PSO-560026 Email - cityhilights.news@gmail.com Phone: 080-41209042. Copyright. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is prohibited.